

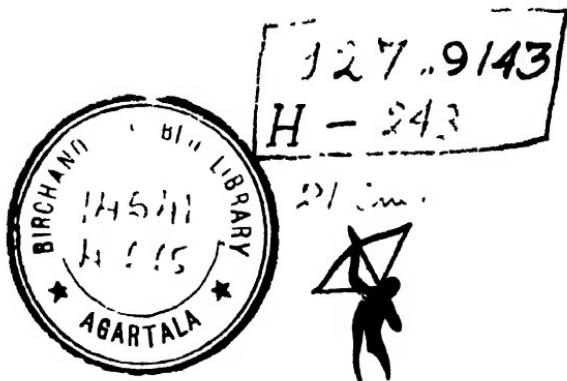
*Ava*



# *Ava*

A PORTRAIT OF A STAR

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I. *The Contessa*





S many stories in a newspaperman's life, Ava's came to me by accident. It began, of all places, in a Brazilian jungle where I was the unit man on a picture called *The Americano*, a film that had been started with a great flourish and a publicity campaign built around the premise that Hollywood in its unceasing search for new and fascinating locales was now turning to the world south of the equator. We had conveniently forgotten an Orson Welles fiasco some years earlier, a picture that, like ours, had to be abandoned.

*The Americano*, however, turned out to be a greater disaster because, being privately financed, there was no big studio to turn to for help after the production went broke. The succession of bad breaks that plagued the movie included the worst of the lot, four weeks of unbroken rain during which a high-priced cast composed of Glenn Ford, Cesar Romero and Arthur Kennedy idled hours and hours away at endless card games.

Kennedy achieved the dubious distinction of working only two days in the eight weeks or so he spent in Brazil. Sarita Montiel, then an unknown Spanish actress, never did make it to the camera.

*The Americano* had been the fourth foreign assignment in my first year in motion picture publicity, a profession I turned

to after a long tenure as a newspaperman covering the theatrical world in Hollywood and New York. The others had led me from *Moulin Rouge* with John Huston in England to France, for *Act of Love*, Italy for *Ulysses*, ultimately to *The Americano* and South America.

As the flight touched down at the International Airport at New York, there was not the slightest doubt in my mind that this picture was also my last. For years I had resisted opportunities in Hollywood to do publicity despite the gulf between the salary of a publicist and a newspaperman.

Having tasted the joys of seeing pay checks in three figures instead of two, I realized I would miss the money but certainly not the work—with its intrusions on one's life, its apple polishing and the dreadful factionalism that makes every film production a snarling political campaign.

Some of the chagrin at the sorry condition I was in, jobless and just associated with one of the worst financial disasters in modern motion picture history, was diminished by New York's cool, crisp October air and the fact that the World Series had just started.

By the seventh inning stretch of the first game, the miles between the TV set in mid town Manhattan and the damp, humid jungle of Brazil stretched as far as the moon. I began to forget the hungry bulls rented for *The Americano* and their unpaid feed bills, the sleepy snake and the Ferdinand-type crocodile that yawned contentedly when it was prodded instead of snapping at Cesar Romero's ankles.

Now just a fuzzy, bad dream was the spectacle at the Santos Wharf of millionaire Glenn Ford dividing up a tiny sponge cake among the Brazilian crew who hadn't eaten all day as he blandly "celebrated" the finish of the picture. And I just didn't seem to care whether Sarita Montiel got back to Mexico City.

Roy Campanella, Sal Maglie, Mickey Mantle, Casey Stengel (in top form), the noise, flash and excitement at the Yankee Stadium were vastly more intriguing. True, the Gillette com-

mercials brought fleeting memories of the vaqueros who had patiently grown beards for *The Americano*, who had neither worked nor been paid for growing the foliage. The commercial breaks reinforced my decision that my former newspaper work possessed a rosier hue than it ever had when I was racing deadlines. I knew, as he always had, that Billy Wilkerson, owner and publisher of the *Hollywood Reporter*, would find a spot for me. Whatever, there was time to think everything over, and for the moment, there were rewards in being indifferent to the mores of the movie world, the bearded vaqueros and the absence of acting talent among the crocodiles of Brazil.

This blissful serenity lasted exactly twenty-four hours when, during the second game and contrary to the time-honored New York tradition that phones never ring on Series afternoons, mine jangled away. The tone of the answering hello was plainly calculated to convey vexation.

But the effect on the caller was lost. Vexed himself, he was Francis Winikus, head of United Artists' publicity department, who not too good-naturedly asked, "What the hell are you doing?"

"Looking at the game of course. What else? Don't tell me you're working?"

"We've been chasing you for two weeks, all the way down to Rio. Why don't you check in when you come home?"

Because, in the eyes of his overlords, nothing a publicity man does is ever right, his first operational rule is to cultivate a strong defense. For *Americano* my defense, carefully "strategized" during the long trek from Rio across the Andes to Lima, Hollywood and New York, was definitely "up," self-righteous and haughty. I explained that the work was completed and that since half my salary remained unpaid, the question of "checking in" was a matter for my discretion, not his.

Moreover, I continued, the stills had been turned in and captioned, the publicity stories written. I had gone through all the motions of finishing the job, not from a sense of responsibility

but to protect my position in case of a dispute about the salary still outstanding.

"And not a damned bit of that work will be used," I complained. "They'll have to shoot the whole picture over in Hollywood—if they ever raise the money."

"Forget *Americano*," interrupted Winikus. "United Artists is out of it. We don't give a damn. Do you know Joe Mankiewicz?"

"No, not personally," I answered, wondering what on earth Mankiewicz had to do with *Americano*, United Artists and *my money*. "But I interviewed him once or twice when I was on the papers."

Winikus rattled on, explaining that Mankiewicz had formed a company, Figaro, Inc., with a United Artists release and was scheduled to commence his first independent production, *The Barefoot Contessa*, in Rome in January of 1954, just three months away.

My name had been mentioned as publicity man for the new company and, as a matter of cold and curious fact, there were no other contenders for the spot.

Winikus, knowing me well, correctly gauged the impact of the magic name of Mankiewicz. Without asking if I was interested he said he would call back to set an appointment with the director.

I put the receiver down slowly. Mankiewicz was a film man of an entirely different caliber from those I had worked with in Europe and in South America. Mankiewicz meant a movie craftsman of wit, taste, intelligence and elegance. A onetime boy wonder, nominated at twenty-one for an Academy Award for his screenplay of *Skippy*, Mankiewicz had matured into a thoughtful, respected creator in the motion picture art—a feat made more remarkable since it entailed emerging from the shadow cast by his brilliant older brother Herman Mankiewicz who, among dozens of distinguished screen credits, wrote *Citizen Kane*.

In conformist Hollywood he maintained his reputation as a soft-spoken but determined individualist. Twice, Mankiewicz in the language of Hollywood had "amicably abrogated" contracts at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and 20th Century-Fox, each of which could have earned him a million dollars.

Later, after settling in New York where he staged a new production of *La Bohème* for the Metropolitan Opera and prepared *Julius Caesar* with producer John Houseman by mail, he explained his defection from Hollywood: "I am constitutionally unable to live in Southern California."

Already we had one point in common.

When Mankiewicz added direction to his talents for writing and producing, he revived the "conversation piece" of the theatre, put it on celluloid and brought it to enchanting fulfillment in *All About Eve* and *A Letter to Three Wives*, films destined to become classics and to adorn Mankiewicz's library with an unprecedented collection of four Oscars.

"Fasten your seat belt," Mankiewicz's line from *All About Eve*, quickly entrenched itself in movie jargon, in the flip language of Madison Avenue and café society. (The first time it appeared in print was in my *Hollywood Reporter* review in Hollywood when I used it for the lead.)

Now, torn between resolution and opportunity, my own seat belt needed fastening, but the decision came quickly: newspapering was always there; Mankiewicz wasn't. At the very least, I might learn something from him.

I did, but it occurred much later in our association, when *Contessa* was just being released and he had started writing the screenplay for *Guys and Dolls*. Watching Mankiewicz work showed me that Academy Award writers have just as much trouble getting started at their writing boards as publicists at their typewriters—maybe more.

But for a man who spent a career writing mainly about women, he taught me nothing about Ava Gardner although for almost two years she affected both our lives.

At that time, however, I leaned on the fact that I was born into a theatrical family and when, some half-dozen telephone calls later, the appointment was arranged, all problems were resolved by that wise show-business axiom—when in doubt, ask for more money.

Mankiewicz's office was exactly what one would expect of someone who had shaken Hollywood's gold dust from his feet. Figaro, Inc., discreetly lettered, occupied the center of the door; Mankiewicz's name, in smaller gold leaf, stood at the lower, right-hand corner. There wasn't an oak panel in sight—just a two-room, white-walled suite occupied by Mankiewicz and his secretary.

Mankiewicz was his charming self. He remembered me from Hollywood, and because United Artists had explained my background in European publicity, there were no questions about qualifications.

In the meantime, I had brushed up on *The Barefoot Contessa*, knew it was Mankiewicz's original story and that its contents, although only a few people had seen the script, had been causing quite a stir in the gossip columns.

It was rumored as a biting lampoon of the high and mighty of Hollywood, a charade of café society and the international set peopled with thinly disguised caricatures of Howard Hughes, the Duke of Windsor, Elsa Maxwell, King Farouk and Hughes' press agent, gladhander Johnny Meyer of the inexhaustible expense account. It was variously reported as an *All About Eve* of the movies, as the life of Jean Harlow, the true story of Rita Hayworth—even that Rita herself would enact the title role.

Mankiewicz, enjoying the speculation, explained where *The Barefoot Contessa* really stood at the time. Humphrey Bogart and Edmond O'Brien had been signed to play, respectively, a film director and press agent. No girl was set. Rita Hayworth was definitely not involved in the casting; Jennifer Jones wanted the part badly.

As he handed me the script, we agreed on a starting date and I was hired.

It was all so easy that I eagerly pressed the advantage and started to talk money. Mankiewicz drew quietly on his pipe. "Take that up with United Artists," he said, deflating my hopes in one puff of smoke, "and whatever you work out with them will be all right with me."

Mentally, I had set a figure 50 per cent higher than that paid for *The Americano* but United Artists, I knew, would be less tractable than Mankiewicz. A half hour or so later when I made my demands, the frown on Winikus' face confirmed this apprehension. "Well, I'm not going out again unless that's the deal," I said, not meaning a word. Winikus frowned again and promised to call me with an answer later in the day.

Proud of being so tough, I returned home and settled down to reading *The Barefoot Contessa*. Today opinions about the picture vary widely and violently. I have met people who have seen it five times as frequently as those who couldn't tolerate it the first time. It has had a curious career in the life of Mankiewicz's short-lived Figaro, Inc., which followed it with *The Quiet American*, a disastrous flop that quickly disappeared from the world's theatres.

*Contessa*, however, lingers on, returning film rentals, steadily though modestly, through the years. It has become a sort of art theatre revival, not unlike another Ava Gardner picture that failed at first to summon audiences, Albert Lewin's production of *Pandora*.

Enthusiasm for the film-to-be, as is the case with all embryonic theatrical projects, was high at the time. There was no denying that as a script it was superb—superb Mankiewicz, wise, witty, sharp and incisive. The much-publicized caricatures literally leaped off the pages, coming to life with deadly accuracy in Mankiewicz's verbose but stimulating dialogue.

As a story, it was a press agent's dream. From Rome, where

normally sensible journalists seize on anything to do with the movies like children reaching out for candy, there would be no trouble in doing a good job.

The publicity clichés wrote themselves—the closed set, the provocative title, the secrecy of the script and the casting of the caricatures. Publicity-wise, *The Barefoot Contessa* couldn't miss, and the anticipation of achieving a decent credit in Europe for a change almost induced me to call off the salary demand.

Almost, but not quite. For by late afternoon Winikus accepted the proposal. The following day I was installed as publicity director for Mankiewicz's fledgling company.

After the details of settling down were disposed of, Mankiewicz called me into his office. As I found a chair he asked, "What do you think of Ava Gardner as Maria?"

Maria was the Contessa of the title, a Spanish girl discovered dancing in a Madrid honky-tonk and catapulted to overnight fame as a film star through the money and power of a sensuous, egocentric industrialist with a penchant for financing movies featuring unknown, beautiful, voluptuous girls.

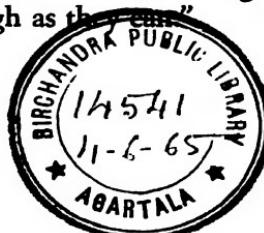
"She'd be fine," I exclaimed quickly, knowing that for all of her supposed lack of acting ability she was incredibly well suited to the physical requirements of the part—a beauty, somewhat cold, with a magnetic, restless, feline quality. "But you'll never get her," I added quickly.

Mankiewicz immediately caught the reference to his *persona non grata* status at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer which held Ava Gardner's contract.

"Well, I want her," he muttered almost savagely as though believing the strength of his own determination would bring it about. "And I'm doing my damndest."

"How does it look?"

"Not good," he answered, shaking his head sadly. "Metro is making it as tough as the hell."



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The reason was clear. Mankiewicz, not one to shy from controversy involving artistic integrity, especially his own, had only recently deplored the manner in which *Julius Caesar* was being exhibited at the Booth Theatre in New York during its posh, first-run, two-a-day engagement.

"You are not seeing the picture in its proper form," he informed newspaper interviewers, referring to the wide screen projection and the stereopticon sound which had been added to *Caesar* after its completion to capitalize on the dimensional processes that in 1953 tumbled over one another along the Great White Way.

"What you are seeing," Mankiewicz blandly told reporters, "is a distorted version of a normal-size black and white motion picture made with standard sound."

Since *Caesar* represented a tentative kiss-and-make-up affair between Mankiewicz and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, after his resignation as top producer and writer several seasons back, the comments were hardly calculated to influence the Culver City lions and win Ava Gardner.

This, though, was Mankiewicz's problem. As for me, I belonged to the school described by Mike Todd in his story of a wardrobe woman who, trampling the producer's protective aides aside, bearded him in his office after the opening of *South Pacific*.

"Did you," she ranted furiously, "tell Winchell that after *South Pacific* no one should produce another musical?"

Todd admitted that he had and also had heard Winchell quote him—correctly—on his Sunday night broadcast.

"You couldn't!" moaned the wardrobe mistress. "Didn't you see them?"

"See what?" inquired Todd.

"The seams—the seams of the dresses. That wide." And she indicated a space from her thumb to her forefinger, stretched out as far as it would go.

Todd loved using this story to explain show people's complete preoccupation with their own jobs and utter indifference to the work of others.

Beyond being aware of her fame as a beauty and the turbulent personal life she led, as recorded in the newspapers, Ava Gardner meant little to me. I remembered reviewing her statuesque body and gorgeous head as being ideal for *One Touch of Venus*, and in *Whistle Stop* I detected more acting ability in her performance than Ava was generally credited as possessing.

But it had been some time since I had reviewed and just as long since I had gone to a movie, and Ava was simply another familiar name. I doubted very much that she would have an important effect on the publicity campaign for *The Barefoot Contessa*—as mistaken a calculation as I ever made in my life.

Although I wanted to, it was impossible for me to remain indifferent to the problem of finding a Contessa. Jennifer Jones was always there, and her agent importuned Mankiewicz almost daily. Beyond Miss Jones, there was not an important prospect in sight and the deadly silence from Hollywood about Ava was chilling.

Because of his contract with Humphrey Bogart, Mankiewicz was obliged to start shooting the first week in January. His production manager, Johnny Johnstone, was already in Rome, renting studio space and offices at Cinecitta. Mankiewicz held a reservation on the *United States*, and I was scheduled to fly to London ahead of him.

Within a few days of our departure, the inevitable happened. The publicity brain trust at United Artists came up with the frayed and tattered idea of a world-wide talent hunt. In theory the idea was sensible because if Mankiewicz could miraculously uncover an unknown girl, place her under contract and introduce her in *Contessa*, his new company would have the advantage of a star for the future. But in practice a search for the "ideal Contessa" was impossible. There simply

wasn't time to put over such an old publicity chestnut. And face it, the winner had not *already* been selected.

Despite misgivings, Mankiewicz and I went along with the suggestion; he, because of his desperate hope that some wondrous, beautiful girl might be uncovered; I, because I had learned that crossing swords with the United Artists publicity hierarchy could be disastrous. I had tried it once or twice before and had come out low man on the totem pole.

United Artists sent out announcements to its international offices asking co-operation in the choosing of a Contessa, requesting them to mail photos of candidates, professional and otherwise, to the company at London and Rome.

A few days later in London I saw the negligible results of the search—the dozens of photographs and biographies—and realized we were up against a blank wall. It was no one's fault—simply lack of time, proper preparation and organization.

I wasn't looking forward to meeting Mankiewicz when the *United States* docked at Southampton.

"Well, what have you been doing?" he inquired straight off.

"I heard Margaret Harshaw sing her first Brünnhilde at Covent Garden."

"How was she?"

"Different."

"And what about the Contessa?" Mankiewicz prodded.

"Not good."

"I wasn't expecting much," said Mankiewicz understandingly. "But we'll have to stick it out as far as it goes! Nothing is happening about Ava."

Figaro, Inc., meaning Mankiewicz and myself, set up London headquarters at the Savoy Hotel. There we sifted photographs, perused casting directories and interviewed a number of actresses, among them Bella Darvi, then the protégée of Darryl Zanuck. Cables from Jennifer Jones' agent pursued Mankiewicz to London.

Although Mankiewicz probably was frantic, and in his position he should have been, he never showed it. He interviewed all comers and scurried to the United Artists projection room to see the tests of various European girls.

He engaged Marie Alden (Tay Garnett's wife) for a part as a drunken show girl, old-timer Bessie Love for a bit. On learning of Bessie's modest English salary, Mankiewicz doubled it and stretched her engagement from one to two weeks. He also signed Marius Goring for the role of the South American bilionaire.

"We might have better luck in Rome," Mankiewicz sighed as we boarded a plane for the Eternal City, and he hid himself behind a crossword puzzle.

Interviewing the young star, Rosanna Podesta, in Rome was indeed encouraging—but only momentarily. She looked a daintier, less voluptuous, more sensitive Contessa than the image produced by thinking of her as Ava Gardner. But using Podesta meant starting immediately, because she was three-months pregnant.

Elizabeth Taylor arrived at the Grand Hotel shortly after Mankiewicz, and I carried a script to her suite, a slight but wasted effort because, like Ava, she was under contract to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Being bigger box office and a more important star, there was less likelihood she could be borrowed.

Yvonne de Carlo's agent, pointing to the actress' success in *The Captain's Paradise*, suggested that *The Barefoot Contessa* was the chance the former Earl Carroll show girl needed to forget her days as the camel-riding star in torrid dramas of the mysterious East. Paulette Goddard also figured vaguely in the handicapping. So did Pier Angeli's sister and as the Rock of Gibraltar Jennifer Jones was still around.

With his stubborn one-track mind, Mankiewicz saw only Ava, and even as the sets were being constructed and we received word that Humphrey Bogart was to arrive (with the warning that he was never to be photographed without either

his hat or his toupee), he made no effort to reach even a tentative decision about another actress.

Night after night he talked over the cranky transatlantic telephone line between Rome and Hollywood to the late Bert Allenberg, an agent of wide influence in the picture business, a partner in Figaro and the representative of both Mankiewicz and Gardner.

Finally, one morning early in November, Mankiewicz called from his apartment, asking me to meet him at Cinecitta as soon as possible.

He arrived ahead of me, and as I entered his office, his face rolled up into a typical Mankiewicz smile—a pixylike expression that seemed as though the full moon, all lighted up, were looking at you.

"You've got Ava" plainly was the only way to say good morning.

Unconcerned that I had penetrated his news so quickly, Mankiewicz nodded happily. The enormous relief of having Ava in the picture, after so many months of waiting, doubts, false hopes and negotiations, constituted all the satisfaction he needed.

"Yes, Bert Allenberg called last night. It's set. They're announcing it right away in the States. You do the same here."

I started to leave. "One thing more," Mankiewicz said, calling me back. "You'd better know the money setup—but it's not for publication."

This was none of my business, but a press agent listens when the boss wants to talk.

"Metro," continued Mankiewicz, "is getting \$200,000 plus 10 per cent of the gross after the first million."

"For Ava Gardner" I exclaimed. "It's crazy!"

"Of course, it is. But I haven't any choice. I want Ava, and that's Metro's deal. They have me over a barrel."

"How much does Ava get out of it?" I asked.

"About \$50,000—maybe \$70,000—not more. And we have to

pay her expenses for six months at \$1,000 a week—working for us or not."

The fabulous star deals of today's movie world had only just begun in 1954, and the enormity of Metro's demand for Gardner was as hard to believe as it was to justify. Humphrey Bogart, an entrenched box-office favorite, accepted \$100,000 for *Contessa*.

Ava, on the other hand, had never really made a good picture. Generally she was found chasing through the wild West with Robert Taylor at her side or tempting Clark Gable away from his wife. She had decorated a Sir Walter Scott costume picture and had once caught the critics' fancy with her performance in *Snows of Kilimanjaro* into which she was rushed on loan-out as a replacement when the actress originally cast became ill. Ava's one "artistic" venture, *Pandora*, had been a flop. Moreover, Ava had never carried a picture alone.

With her youth and fabulous looks she was far from an also-ran; equally certain, she could not be considered a top-drawer star, an all-time international favorite like Garbo, Crawford, Bette Davis, Ginger Rogers, and a dozen others. She wasn't in the same league with Vivien Leigh—nor even Jennifer Jones.

These were the thoughts that ran through my mind while preparing the dry, perfunctory announcement that Ava had been signed for *The Barefoot Contessa*. But the ink had barely dried on the mimeograph machine before I was confronted—and startled—by an entirely new conception of the extraordinary personality known as Ava Gardner.

The Roman grapevine had the news of Ava's signing even before Mankiewicz and within minutes of our conversation my telephone at Cinecitta began to jangle incessantly, continuing straight through the day and into the evening at the hotel.

The wire services, the Italian magazines, British correspondents, free-lance photographers (who came by the dozen in Rome), publication offices in Milan, converged on my ear to know exactly when Ava would arrive, where she would stay, where she was at the moment—all assuming that an advance

battery of interviewers and photographers could go to work on her.

If this seemed astonishing so was the appearance within forty-eight hours of at least one hundred fan letters from all over Italy on my desk, awaiting Ava's arrival.

The announcement consumed the front pages of newspapers and magazines, embellished with stories about Ava's life, her marital misadventures and, occasionally, her career. The Italian national radio devoted whole programs to commentary about her. And from all Europe there poured in telegrams requesting stories, interviews, photos—just anything to do with Ava.

*Candido*, Italy's satirical weekly, published a cartoon showing a gorgeous lady, obviously Ava, brandishing a sword, obviously Damocles', over a clothesline on which hung four stockings. Poking out of three were the heads of Mickey Rooney, Artie Shaw, and Frank Sinatra. The fourth was empty. Below the drawing, *Candido* captioned wickedly: *Joseph L. Mankiewicz?*

One reason for the hoopla was that a few days earlier Ava and Frank Sinatra, guided by MGM's publicity department, had issued a typical noncommittal Hollywood statement that they had separated. There was no mention of divorce.

Still, in my mind, this didn't justify the extent of the excitement nor did Ava's unhappy experience of the year before when she had accompanied Frank Sinatra through Europe on a concert tour. At Naples, unpleasant headlines had appeared after the manager of the theatre advertised that Ava would also be seen in the performance on the stage. This had never been intended but the audience would not be pacified and even as Sinatra sang they chanted, "We want Ava! We want Ava!"

The couple's subsequent tour through Germany and the Scandinavian countries was characterized by violent quarrels, the full details of which sifted into a press which had become completely unsympathetic. Although all the blame was not fastened on Ava, Frank Sinatra's bellicose attitude rubbed off,

so she was arriving in Rome with at least two strikes against her. It would remain for Ava to swing at the third.

It became increasingly clear to me that Ava was fair game for all the syndicates, magazines and newspapers of Europe—as well as those at home. Mankiewicz also felt the impact and found himself unable to move around Rome without being bombarded by questions about Ava. Reporters rang his phone as persistently as they did mine.

That, with the loan-out completed, Ava decided to fly immediately to Rome hardly served to calm the agitation. When Mankiewicz advised me that she would be arriving shortly, he warned seriously, "Ava's a strange girl. Her moods are quick and violent. You can never predict them." Concerned by all the press furor and my report that Ava's arrival at Ciampino Airport would be covered by dozens of newspapers, hordes of photographers, radio and television, he wondered if there were some way they could be called off.

"Not a chance in the world," I explained. "The interest is incredible. All we can do is to try to organize things so that Ava gets out of the plane and through the customs as quickly as possible. We'll announce a press conference a couple of days later."

Still Mankiewicz remained unconvinced. "What about taking her off the plane at Milan and driving her to Rome?"

"Just as bad. Maybe worse. And she's coming direct from Hollywood without a stopover. A car trip to Rome would be too much. Look now," and I took a different viewpoint, "Ava's not a baby. She's been in the business for years and she must know what to expect, especially in view of the separation announcement. I'll work on all the airport arrangements."

Mankiewicz was forced to agree, and at that moment I put my faith in the intelligence of a woman I had never met—a faith that wasn't broken until seven long, fascinating, always exciting years later.

Arranging Ava's exit from the airplane wasn't all that difficult. It merely required organization and co-ordination among the

Italians of the production crew, who knew Ciampino and the ins and outs of police control and customs well.

We worked out a routine, placing Ava's car at the most convenient exit and dividing among ourselves the jobs of getting her baggage tickets, passports stamped and moving luggage—and Ava—into the Grand Hotel where she was registered temporarily. We knew Ava was anxious for an apartment and, with that in mind, a secretary-companion had already been hired—the traditional frail-looking but steel-willed, elegant lady from Italian nobility, steeped in the lore of catering to the whims of wealthy American visitors. She was, I believe, a princess.

Everything I predicted about Ava's arrival at the airport came true. There were photographers, of all nationalities, by the dozens. Reporters with poised pencils and open notebooks stood ready to interrogate the Contessa. Eagerly, almost frantically, they sought out anyone connected with the company, asking questions from what she would be wearing to would she talk about Sinatra?

It was a lead-pipe cinch that no actress would—or could—pause in that mob to discuss a marital estrangement, so I settled that query promptly with a loud "No."

When the plane landed, Mankiewicz and I were on the field, edged close to the ramp and surrounded by our Italians, good, strong muscle men. The reporters and photographers hemmed us in on all sides.

A stewardess darted down the steps, looked out in bewilderment at the sea of cameras, the crowd and the TV lights. After a surprised pause she drew her breath and announced to no one in particular, "Miss Gardner will come out last."

The other passengers traipsed down but, instead of passing straight through into customs, they paused in curiosity and joined the throng.

After what seemed an indeterminable time, Ava appeared at the head of the ramp—serene, cool, self-possessed and seemingly as sure of herself as a thoroughbred leaving the paddock.

She was dressed conservatively in a light gray suit with simple pleats in the skirt, a tight-fitting jacket and a polka-dot kerchief around her neck. She wore no hat. Her hair was pulled back but not so tightly that the evening breeze couldn't catch it up. Over one arm she carried a simple cloth coat. Her hand held a black bag. Her smile was radiant.

This was the first time I saw Ava Gardner step out of an airplane, but there were hundreds thereafter. And I discovered through the years that no one in the world could project as artfully as Ava a devastating picture of simplicity, directness and charm.

She walked briskly down the steps, her eyes straight ahead, twinkly and bright, as she smiled warmly at the crowd.

Thank heavens, I thought, I didn't let Mankiewicz talk me into dumping her in Milan. She's superb, a stunning showman.

The disembarking worked like clockwork. Ava, on her side, had things as efficiently under control as we did—tickets and passport ready. When I introduced myself she turned them over to me, without once missing the pulse of the crowd or a detail of the flashing bulbs. Mankiewicz stayed close to her for just a few yards, then let her go as she strode quickly into the cameras, always smiling gaily. To the reporters who laid siege and asked for statements about Sinatra, she replied serenely, never losing her smile, her temper or her poise, "No comment."

It was all over in about six and a half minutes.

Mankiewicz and Ava sped away to the Grand in the Cadillac. I remained behind to supervise the passport and control the luggage.

We rushed Ava's dozen or so valises to the Grand Hotel, where she and Mankiewicz were already in deep conversation about *The Barefoot Contessa*. Flowers filled every corner of the room, and they had opened a bottle of champagne.

"I don't suppose you read the script," I heard Mankiewicz say laughingly.

"No, I didn't," answered Ava honestly. "But I read the out-

line. Anyhow, I just had to play it." She paused. "You know I've got pretty feet." She kicked up her legs to show them.

Preoccupied with the luggage, I could only assess the remark casually, but it seemed a damned-fool way of settling on a part. I shrugged it away as being none of my business as Ava rattled on: "Hell, Joe, I'm not an actress, but I think I understand this girl. She's a lot like me."

Mankiewicz smiled. "That's why I wanted you. But the main thing is that you're here. How did you manage it?"

Ava told her story—how she had arranged the deal when no one else could. "Bert kept calling," she chatted away, "but all they gave him was the runaround. And there wasn't anything ready for me—not one damned script. And you know I always do better outside the studio anyhow. Well, when this thing came up with Frank I was frantic. I went to everybody, Dore Schary, Eddie Mannix, Harry Rapf and finally Bennie Thau.

"He always liked me. Joe, I raised the roof. I told him what I thought, that I'd always been the good girl of the company, doing every lousy part in every lousy damned picture Metro ever made. I never complained, never took a suspension, nothing. I told him I just had to get out of Hollywood now—right now—or I'd blow my top. I guess that scared him. So he said yes and that's all there was to it. He called Bert and here I am."

Now it was Mankiewicz's turn to explain what had gone on in New York, London and Rome, how night after night he had talked, cajoled and begged Allenberg to keep pressing, not to let the offer die. Finally, Mankiewicz told Ava what he was paying Metro for her services.

Ava listened to the astronomical figures quietly, interested but not surprised. She reached for another glass of champagne.

"That's Metro," she said coldly. "They'll louse you every time."

There is a fixed, traditional procedure about greeting celebrities at airports and transporting them to a hotel. After a couple of drinks, the home team disappears, leaving the newcomers

alone, the assumption being that they are tired. Why film stars should be more tired after a long trip than ordinary mortals has never been explained, especially since, as Ava had, they customarily sleep throughout the entire flight.

Mankiewicz, evidently a traditionalist in this respect, shot several meaningful glances at me during the conversation, all designed to mean "Let's shuffle along." We had a drink for the road and started to go. For the hundredth time, Mankiewicz said, "You're tired, Ava. Rest tonight and we'll talk everything over when I get back from London in a day or two. I'm flying there tomorrow. Meanwhile, David and the boys at the studio will take care of you."

I wrote down my name, address and phone number and showed Ava where I had put it on the desk. "Call me for whatever you need," I said.

Some sixth sense kept telling me that leaving was a mistake, that Ava didn't want us to go and that it would have been wiser had I at least stayed behind.

How correct my sixth sense was I learned later but Mankiewicz was running the show, and there was no alternative then but to join him as he left.

## 2.

Shortly before Ava's arrival, the United Artists brass had arrived in Rome to work out the details of organizing *The Barefoot Contessa* as a co-production with Italian financial interests in the persons of Robert Haggiag, a bright aggressive European film executive, and Angelo Rizzoli, a tycoon who holds influential publishing interests in Italy, notably the lively

Italian magazine *Europea*. At that time because of his dabbling in motion picture financing, he was called the William Randolph Hearst of Italy. He since has abandoned theatrical investments, claiming that none of them ever earned him a lira.

Beyond the coldness with which they approached a financial deal and wearing the same style of form-fitting, tightly buttoned Italian suits, Haggiag and Rizzoli bore no resemblance to each other. Rizzoli was stern and autocratic; Haggiag warm and friendly, full of enthusiasm for the picture business, in which he had been engaged all his life by way of theatre holdings in Libya, financial interests in European productions and as head of the company holding the United Artists franchise in Italy, D.E.A.R. Films.

In the United Artists or American corner of the negotiating ring were Max Youngstein, vice-president in charge of advertising, Arnold Picker, foreign sales manager, Arthur Krim, the president of United Artists, and Charles Smadja, head of the company's European operations. Being the linguist of this contingent Smadja automatically became chairman of the meetings.

I attended only the final conclave when the papers were officially signed. The negotiations until then had been protracted and there were even rumors that a co-production might not be worked out. Then with the dramatic signing of *Ava*, just a shade more than a month before the film was scheduled to start, the conferences were accelerated and the deal suddenly closed.

Today the word *co-production* has lost some of the luster associated with it back in the early fifties when, not only in Italy but all over Europe, it appeared to be the panacea for many of the ills that were plaguing the film industry. Although Hollywood had become a poor risk for investment and its days as the entertainment capital of the world were numbered, it still maintained power and eminence by virtue of its monopoly on talent, especially stars. Moreover, the Americans knew distribution of films on a global scale whereas the Europeans had heretofore been satisfied with the modest returns found within the borders

of their respective countries. Collaboration between the Continent and Hollywood seemed inevitable and wise.

Perhaps the blanket-sized bundles of Italian lire, French francs and English sterling were not the U. S. greenbacks American movie men were used to. But, hard currency or soft, it was money, and money for movie production was hard to come by in those days. Wall Street and American banks which once had found movie financing profitable had clamped down on film loans, after some postwar debacles left them holding interests in pictures so poor that even TV didn't want them.

There were good reasons for the availability of money in Europe. Some of the cash that went into co-production represented frozen funds earned by American film distribution companies that governments permitted to be unblocked only if invested in the country where they had been earned. Whenever a co-production was put together, the Americans pooled their frozen funds to make the project possible.

*Contessa*, because of its continental theme, was a natural, meeting not only all the qualifications of a co-production but those of a picture with Italian nationality. This meant that it could play in Italy without being a part of the United Artists quota. It would receive preferred playing time and could even qualify for a government subsidy. These were the features that attracted Rizzoli and Haggiag—these and Ava Gardner.

The extent of their investment represented a guess as to the film's potential in Italy. I have no idea of the original offer nor the final arrangement, but it is a safe assumption that United Artists held out for a much larger figure once Ava entered the picture as the feminine star.

With the conference over, the executives left for other missions, leaving behind Arthur Krim, who had decided to spend the Thanksgiving holiday in Rome. Krim, charming, good company, much younger and more genial than a film company's president should be, lost no time in getting in touch with the latest recruit in United Artists' rapidly expanding star roster.

Ava was another coup in the company's emergence from a two-decades-long position as an also-ran to an aggressive leader in the industry.

Krim delightedly took Ava in tow—which made me feel much more comfortable about her. It meant I would have another hand—and a strong one at that—to handle her during Mankiewicz's absence.

A day or two after her arrival, Krim called to say he was inviting Ava and me to dinner. He set eight o'clock at Ava's suite as the time and place of meeting.

Despite all the aggravation suffered in a lifetime of punctuality that has compelled me to wait hours for the tardy great of the theatrical world, I still insist on being where I am supposed to be at the appointed hour. Consequently, when I picked up the Grand Hotel telephone sharply at eight, the last voice I expected to hear was Ava's. Surely one had a right to expect Ava Gardner, of all people, to be in the bath, which since time immemorial has been a mysterious haven for unpunctual actresses.

"Come on up," she answered briskly, and as I bounced up the stairs I figured that, being out of the bath, Ava would resort to that second and equally time-honored detour, the dressing table. I could almost hear her saying, "Excuse me for just a moment while I finish my make-up. Pour yourself a drink."

The door of Ava's suite was ajar, so a slight knock and an immediate entrance brought me quickly inside. There was Ava all alone, stunningly dressed, every hair in place, a shimmering necklace around her neck.

"What do you want to drink?" she started, not noticing my surprise at the apparition of beauty she presented, or my astonishment that she was dressed, ready, and *on time*.

Without waiting for an answer, a mumbled "Whatever you're having," Ava deftly went to work on a martini, mixing it in prescribed Beverly Hills fashion—powder-dry, eight-to-one—evading the ice tongs the waiter had thoughtfully provided. Instead she plopped the ice from the bucket to shaker with her

hand. This operation completed, she suddenly slipped her fingers into the mixture and wiggled them energetically for some twenty or thirty seconds. "Never bruise the gin," she explained, answering my surprised expression. "Never use metal. I just put the slightest scent on my fingers when I mix martinis. Here, see if you like it."

This was the first of hundreds of Gardner-made martinis that I drank in the years that followed, the last as fragrantly exotic as the first.

Arthur Krim obviously belonged to the school of punctuality, since he trailed me by only a few minutes. He savored his martini with relish and from his easiness with Ava I could see that a satisfying rapport had been established between them.

After a modest quota of cocktails we were off to Alfredo's, the restaurant one is honor-bound to visit during one's first days in Rome. Alfredo, famed for his *fettucini*, was once given a gold serving spoon and fork by Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. The originals have long since passed from use but there are enough duplicates around to keep both distinguished and undistinguished tourists beguiled, as the guest of honor at each table tucks awkwardly but happily into the *pasta*, which is supposed to be eaten directly from the serving bowl.

Ava, naturally, was given the outsized cutlery at our table and old Alfredo himself mixed the *fettucini*; the restaurant lights flashed on and off and the orchestra played the special music reserved for the ceremony.

The musicians lost no time in finding their way to our table; Ava's affection for them and for music evidently was internationally known. I was surprised to discover how many Italian songs Ava knew and requested and how well she pronounced their names with barely a trace of an American accent.

The evening literally sped along. The musicians played on and on as Ava stowed away course after course of an enormous meal. I could only wonder how, if this were her habit—and I

discovered that it was—she kept that gorgeous figure under control.

It was nearly midnight when we left the restaurant and headed for the Grand Hotel where Krim also was stopping. I said good night to Ava and the car drove me a few blocks away to my small hotel on the Via Sardegna.

It had been a quiet, altogether charming evening and my relief that it was over lay in the fatigue produced by the excitement of Ava's arrival—not Ava. Although she had dominated the evening, she was charming and vivacious, and, unlike most celebrities, a delight to be with. Any notion that she was simply another stupid Hollywood beauty had been dispelled. Ava definitely counted in my book as a bright, witty and intelligent person.

I climbed wearily but happily into bed.

I have no idea of the hour, but it must have been all of three in the morning when the jangling of the telephone startled me awake. I had barely lifted the receiver when a voice at the other end, unmistakably Ava's, started, "I want to look at apartments. I hate hotels. I want to move right away."

It took a few seconds to thump my brain into a response and I muttered some kind of an answer: that apartments simply couldn't be visited so early in the morning, that she would have to wait until later.

"But I want to move right now," she answered, almost screaming.

By this time I was sufficiently alert to make some kind of coherent reply and explained that, mindful of her requirements, the company had collected a list of apartment possibilities and that a production assistant, Michael Washinsky, had been assigned the job of assisting her. I promised her he would call the first thing in the morning or at any other convenient time. "Have him here at nine," she said, hanging up abruptly.

It was fairly obvious that my first encounter with Ava under stress had not been an unqualified success.

I went back to sleep and wasn't the least surprised when the telephone rang again—this time at dawn. I was surprised into complete wakefulness on hearing that the call originated in London. The caller was Joe Mankiewicz, a man not given to early-morning rising and certainly never to sunrise telephoning. It could only mean trouble.

He wasted no time on preliminaries. "What's the matter? What's going on? I told you to look after Ava."

"But I have," I answered defensively, "and so has Arthur Krim." I explained what had taken place and told him about Ava's telephone call of a few hours ago. Mankiewicz, disturbed but not angry, said that Ava had telephoned him too, complaining about staying at the hotel and insisting if she couldn't move right out she would go back to Hollywood. I could volunteer no information why she had become so upset between midnight and dawn, since when I left her she couldn't have been more cheerful.

I promised Mankiewicz no time would be lost in getting the house hunting under way, if that had become a bone of contention.

"Do your best to keep her calm," Mankiewicz said wearily. "I'll be back in Rome tomorrow."

No more predawn calls came through from Ava for the next few days as she busied herself house hunting with Mike Washinsky and making the Roman rounds with Arthur Krim.

Ava's choice of a home for her six months' stay in Rome seemed an unlikely selection for a movie star. She had picked out a dark, big, musty apartment on the first floor of an old building on the Corso d'Italia. It literally groaned under the weight of heavy, ornate rococo furniture. There were the usual muraled walls so dear to Italian hearts, statues by the dozen and bric-a-brac in every corner. A huge piano that hadn't been tuned for years filled a large section of the living room. Ava's bedroom faced right on Corso d'Italia, a street which certainly deserves

a high place in any list of the world's noisiest thoroughfares. Talking against the jangling of street cars, the roar of the Vespas and the hubbub of noisy passers-by made conversation livelier but also something of a hog-calling contest.

When I visited the house the first time, I found Ava in the vanguard of a cleaning squadron composed of her driver, Mario, her personal maid, the chef and the kitchen maid. With a scarf tied around her head, broom in hand, she looked the very picture of a chic, suburban housewife. She made no mention of her telephone marathon, and I, of course, was disinclined to bring it up. I had stored the incident away as simply an isolated case of nerves produced by strain. That Ava's nocturnal telephoning habits came from nerves I discovered to be true. That they were isolated was simply an illusion, as I found out later.

Ava led me to a pile of dirt inches high. "Look at this, will you, and that's not the half of it. This place hasn't been cleaned in years," she said, pointing to another collection of debris in a different corner of the room.

"In years? Not in centuries," I quipped. "Probably not since the days of the Borgias."

"The Borgias? Who are they?" Ava asked.

I gave some kind of a flip reply that didn't satisfy her. Ava persisted in knowing more and I drew a sketchy outline of the villainous family of aristocrats that scandalized Florence and Rome hundreds of years ago. Ava listened attentively.

I was not surprised that she had never heard of the Borgias but I was impressed by her sincerity in wanting to know more about them. Ava's curiosity, her willingness and eagerness to learn, I discovered to be among her more disarming characteristics. "Say some big words to me," she used to say, "and tell me what they mean."

Ava, I grew to realize, was always terribly self-conscious about the gaps in her formal education. And if, beyond the fact that Ava's education stopped after high school and a year of secre-

tarial training, there were no other reasons for her inferiority complex, her trio of husbands were certainly calculated to help her develop one.

I had known Mickey Rooney personally when he was a youngster, starring in pictures but, nevertheless, still a teen-age boy growing up. There wasn't a doubt in my mind that he was the smartest thing on two feet. At sixteen or seventeen he possessed a vocabulary of which a best-selling author could be jealous. He expressed himself intelligently and his range of interests was wide.

Like Rooney and more so, Frank Sinatra can claim a superficial knowledge of many things, ranging from politics to books, from art to racial problems. When he tackles one in conversation he can be positively impressive, dogmatically sure of himself.

I soon came to the conclusion that Ava, unlike myself, who had been reared in a theatrical family, had never learned the first important lesson in maintaining a relationship with an actor—never confuse his ability to read lines well with erudition.

Submitted to any test, Ava's general knowledge would match that of the average actress in her position. Certainly none that I've ever met—stretching back to Alice Brady and Mrs. Leslie Carter and today's Audrey Hepburn, Gina Lollobrigida and Sophia Loren—could boast of so good a memory or of Ava's capacity to assimilate information quickly.

This was illustrated dramatically during her marriage to Artie Shaw, which took place at the time he had abandoned the murky jazz cellars and was playing a few select clubs while preparing for the day he would abandon the band business to pursue his intellectual leanings. Artie was ambitious to remodel Ava who, then as now, always referred to herself as a "dumb broad." Following Artie's suggestion she enrolled for extension courses at the University of California at Los Angeles and proudly brought home A's and B's in literature, psychology and philosophy. Evidently, finding his Galatea so damnably smart

floored Mr. Shaw. He promptly lost interest in her mental prowess. After teaching her chess and being roundly thumped once or twice, Artie quietly returned the set to the closet.

Only recently I picked up an interview Ava had given to David Lewin in the London *Daily Express* in which, using words I had heard time after time, she deplored the fact that she had not been properly educated. "I'd like to go to school," Ava is quoted as saying. "Just before I left Hollywood several years ago I was going to an analyst and he suggested I take private tutoring.

"I went to a sweet woman, I bought some books, an H. G. Wells history, a volume of philosophy, a set of encyclopedias, and we picked subjects and wrote essays.

"Then I came to Europe and I didn't go to school. I'm shy of people . . . but I wouldn't be shy going to class."

This appears an honest and easily attained ambition, but the fact remains that studying is not Ava's strong point—not that she is incapable of doing it but because she won't. Her Spanish is wonderfully accented and grammatically accurate so far as it goes. It has been brought to this point only by her sporadic attempts at study and an imitative ear that is an enormous asset in learning a language. It could progress further but it probably never will because Ava is lazy and too poorly organized to improve it. Ava is a dreamer, not a doer.

None of these ideas about Ava were in my mind as she proudly showed me how she had solved the problem of hanging her clothes in the antiquated Corso d'Italia apartment—by assembling all the glass-doored cupboards in the place and standing them side by side in the dressing room. The effect was rather startling—something like a costume exhibition at a museum. But it was practical.

Ava knew a little Spanish then which had helped her pick up a few essential words of Italian with which she was managing the servants excellently. If forced into English she seemed to know which words the Italians might understand best; when

everything failed she simply acted out her instructions like a charade.

I had come to talk about the press conference and to obtain her final approval of the arrangements. She reminded me she would not answer any personal questions but otherwise she was prepared to take on all comers. With the details agreed upon, I started to leave and had just reached the door when Ava called out, "Don't forget the orchestra and for heaven's sake, have the room as dimly lit as possible."

The hiring of an orchestra had not been planned, and I would have a battle for the extra appropriation. But if it made Ava happier I was determined it would be done. Any publicity director would need to have his head examined if he didn't realize how valuable Ava was to the campaign for *The Barefoot Contessa*. Her continued co-operation was terribly important, especially to my ambition to make *Contessa* the best-publicized film of the year.

Lights were something I took for granted and the thought of dimming had never occurred to me. I saw Ava had projected a strong suggestion, so I lost no time in getting to the Grand Hotel ballroom, where the reception would be held, to investigate the lights.

Europeans are dedicated to brilliant overhead illumination and when the ballroom lights were turned on for my edification the management beamed with delight at the pyrotechnic display. Their pleasure turned to dismay at the modifications I requested. Since I was afraid they would not be adhered to, I insisted that bulbs be removed from some of the chandeliers and the switches of others be covered with adhesive tape. That way I would be certain they wouldn't be turned on in the middle of Ava's appearance.

I lighted the Grand Hotel ballroom that day and many times thereafter, not only for Ava but for other stars. One was Audrey Hepburn, whom I handled when assigned to *War and Peace*. Audrey delightedly exclaimed, "That room! The lighting! It was

so beautiful. Who did it?" I said rather proudly it was my work and I had learned the trick from Ava. "Well!" said Audrey warmly and with her characteristic sincerity. "You thank Ava the next time you see her for me and for giving you such a good education. You have no idea what a difference it makes to a woman during a session like this to know the lights are flattering her."

The press conference came through without a hitch. Ava was radiantly beautiful and charmed the Rome corps off its feet. Gate crashers were plentiful but you got used to tolerating them in Rome. One minor incident occurred involving American-born Michael Bongiorno, then a fledgling TV reporter who is now a television star in Italy. Bongiorno had blandly set up his equipment in Ava's retiring room while she was meeting the press downstairs.

Obviously Mike presumed that his efforts would embarrass her into an interview. Ava would have none of it, claiming her Metro contract forbade TV appearances. Disappointed, he dismantled the equipment and left. I thought surely he would make capital of her refusal on his chatter show but he didn't and the party went on the books as one of the best in Rome's movie history.

Pages and pages of pictures taken of Ava at the reception filled the Italian papers and weeklies. Ava adorned literally dozens of covers. It was evident that she was the toast of the town.

I began to spend more time with her, dropping in regularly at the apartment, accompanying her to Fontana's the two or three times a week she went there for fittings on the wardrobe she wore in the picture, some two dozen gowns, each more extravagant than the other.

One afternoon, I was introduced to a young, curly-haired, handsome Italian whose name, Walter Chiari, I recognized as belonging to a popular comedian starring in a revue in Rome. He sat quietly on the sofa, not even attempting to join in the

conversation. Obviously he spoke no English, for no comedian, I knew, would be silent otherwise. Some few years later, after Chiari had mastered the language, this observation proved correct, and I would now put my money on Walter Chiari as being more voluble than George Jessel and Milton Berle combined.

I attached no special meaning to Walter's visit since I knew Ava had seen the revue a few days earlier, and Rome newspapers reported she had gone backstage to meet him. Moreover, he was engaged to Lucia Bosé, a young Italian star, and, in the Italian fashion of long betrothals, had been for some time.

As Ava handed me a martini, she drew me aside. "Do you think I could go to Madrid for a few days at Christmas? I'm up to date on everything and no one will be working anyhow."

It wasn't within my authority to give her permission, but I promised to take up the matter with Johnny Johnstone and report back as soon as I could get an answer.

Ava was right. Little work would be done over the holidays and the costume fittings were as much on schedule as costume fittings ever are—which is to say they are never really completed. (Likely as not, that breath-taking gown your favorite actress is wearing had its flap wide open in the back or stayed on only because of an old-fashioned safety pin when it was being photographed.) Ava also had nearly finished posing for the life-sized statue of her that was used in the picture and now graces Frank Sinatra's back yard.

Like all production managers, Johnstone demurred at the idea of his star flying, but he gave his consent and I promptly relayed the news to Ava the next day.

She was strangely quiet as she brought me into her bedroom and closed the door. "Sinatra called me last night. He's flying to Madrid for Christmas."

The obvious question popped into my head. "Will he be coming to Rome too?"

"He says he is," she replied in a flat voice, "but I don't know for sure."

She sat down on the bed, plainly distraught. "It'll be a mess. Why the hell does he do it—and this of all times. I was looking forward to Madrid."

I agreed that it would be a mess. "If he comes here, Ava, you know what the press will do. They'll murder both of you. They'll stake out this house with photographers day and night. You won't be able to move. They'll be on your tail every minute."

"I know, I know," she said. "But what can I do about it? I can't tell him not to come."

We formulated our plans for handling the press. I had already made arrangements to spend two or three days of the Christmas holidays in Sorrento. I proposed to Ava that I stick with the plans which would make me conveniently unavailable to the press and the furor that would be stirred the second Sinatra left America. Just as I had immediately inquired if he were coming to Rome, the same question would be asked by reporters in Europe and the States.

It was a built-to-order front-page story. This was not the first time Sinatra had dramatically flown to Spain to court Ava. There had been the triangle of Ava, Sinatra and the Spanish bullfighter, Mario Cabre, a few years before. Ava, not yet married to Sinatra, was making *Pandora* when reports slipped out of a little village, Tosa del Mar, that she was being seen constantly in Cabre's company. No one rushed into print to deny the stories; rather, Cabre grandly dispatched his poems about Ava to the press and they were seized upon avidly by newspapers all over the world.

Sinatra's flight was considered a publicity stunt at the time. Ava vehemently denies this now but surely the makings of a stunt were there. Frank flew to Spain by regular carrier and chartered plane, picking up the latter in London since he was too impatient to wait for the regular flight. He carried a magnificent necklace for Ava, a full description of which circulated in the press. At Barcelona he represented himself as an avenging

suitors who had come to beat the daylights out of Cabre. The papers said he challenged Cabre to a duel. Cabre conveniently found bullfighting engagements far removed from Tosa del Mar during Sinatra's stay and quietly removed himself from Ava's life.

All this would be rehashed the second the press got wind of Sinatra's plans. The visit would stir up new speculation about a reconciliation. And among other old wounds that would be opened were the memories of Sinatra's and Ava's stormy whirl through Italy the year before. I hated to think of the kind of reception he would get and didn't welcome having to be a part of it.

Bearing this in mind I suggested that Ava confide in Metro, whose Rome manager, Lee Kamern, besides being obliged to watch over her professionally, was a warm and good friend. "Why not let him handle it?" I asked. Ava said, "No, sweetie, you meet me at the airport. We'll play it by ear."

The fretfulness induced by knowing Ava might return to Rome with Sinatra was almost forgotten in the fun of her departure for Madrid, on her birthday, Christmas Eve. A whole group of us collected at the airport to see her off. Bob Haggiag, whom Ava now called "Hodge Podge," was in charge of ceremonies. Hanging over the airport bar we toasted her birthday with quantities of champagne and Haggiag presented her with a lovely brooch.

An old chum of mine, an Italo-American actor, was passing through on his way to New York. Ava cheerfully posed for a picture with him. It was altogether a delightful, impromptu party. It was good to see Ava so happy and I wondered if, despite her outward indifference, she was secretly looking forward to seeing Frank again.

Ava departed in a whirl of affectionate embraces, and I drove quietly from the airport to the south and my lonely, quiet Christmas. All too soon the message I dreaded arrived. Ava

would be returning a day or so before New Year's Eve—and with Frank.

On returning to Rome I met all the excitement I had envisioned. It was useless to read the numerous messages at my office and the hotel. They poured in. London newspapers had called long distance. As he handed them to me the room clerk observed in an English phrase I had taught him, "The press is on your tail, this time for sure."

Naturally, I answered none of the calls and on arriving at the airport made myself as inconspicuous as possible to avoid being asked questions. The place literally groaned with reporters and photographers, twice as many as for Ava's arrival.

When Ava and Sinatra appeared at the top of the ramp they presented a sorry sight. Ava was sniffling behind dark glasses with a cold and Frank's face was frowning. He brushed reporters aside, held Ava's arm firmly. In the customs hall he started to lunge at one of the photographers. Ava put out a restraining hand. "Please, Frank, don't," she said pleadingly. Sinatra held back; the two made their way through the crowd to the car, which was waiting with its motor running. And, as usual, I stayed behind to assemble and transport the baggage.

On reaching Corso d'Italia I sighed with relief. No photographers were evident but I realized that this was only the lull before the storm. Obviously the press had figured correctly that Ava and Sinatra would be unlikely to stir out that night, that it would be useless to try to corner them until the next day.

Neither Ava nor Sinatra was to be seen when I delivered the valises so I left quickly. The less I knew about the reunion the better. I told this to the press next day when they called again and again, hoping to get some inkling of what were presumed to be reconciliation talks. I insisted that Ava was simply the star of a picture I was handling; her personal life was not in my domain—an attitude that earned me few friends among the truculent Rome press corps. I often pondered how they

would treat me if I came through Rome after *Contessa* handling a dog act, or the comeback of Toby Wing. I could conjure up a picture of a blacklisting that would reduce one of Louella Parsons' famed feuds of the good old days in Hollywood to a polite family argument over the morning newspaper.

On New Year's Eve, Frank and Ava gave a party which had been put together by Mike Washinsky with a guest list purporting to represent the *crème de la crème* of Roman society. The hosts had never met their guests before and the zeal to keep the affair elegant led to the overlooking of some important members of the company. Johnny Johnstone, for instance, refused a last-minute cover-up invitation.

Sensing what a strain the evening would be, I carefully put my overcoat on top of the pile and managed to steal away a few minutes after 1954 had been welcomed in with champagne toasts. The hour or so that I was there I spent listening fascinated to Sinatra's lucid, intelligent, and wonderfully knowledgeable forecast of all the revolutions that were coming in the field of sound electronics. The many-syllabled, technical words rippled off his tongue as casually as the lyrics to a Rodgers and Hart song. I had to remind myself of my own philosophy—never confuse an actor's ability to read lines well with knowledge.

I marveled at Sinatra's charm and personality, his vigor and vitality, just as I had years before when I interviewed him in New York immediately after a fracas with a Hearst columnist, Lee Mortimer, whom he slugged at Ciro's, allegedly for making an offensive remark about Italians. Directly after the flurry of fists he flew to New York; consequently no California reporter had heard his side of the story. The Los Angeles Hearst paper, the *Examiner*, had, naturally, exploited Mortimer's report because he belonged to their own stable.

In those days Sinatra's career and more particularly, his press relations, were in the wise hands of George Evans. Because I was doing a Broadway column for the Los Angeles *Daily News*,

Evans sought me out and set up an interview with Sinatra at the Copacabana, aware that the paper and I would be inclined to be sympathetic. We were and the story, an exclusive, broke page one.

Sinatra had long since forgotten the incident and I didn't remind him of it before I stole away from the party, hoping as I went, that no newspapermen, as rumored, had sneaked in. Evidently it was an altogether uneventful evening, since there were no telephone calls from Corso d'Italia on New Year's day, the next, or on the succeeding day. The silence was overwhelming and plainly agonizing to the two or three photographers compelled to walk up and down in front of Ava's building to keep themselves warm. They kept their vigil around the clock but failed to obtain any pictures.

Suddenly, Sinatra was gone. He had been called back to Hollywood for a picture and somehow managed to slip away, completely eluding the press. The first they knew of his flight was when he was aboard the plane and well on his way to the States.

Ava called me shortly thereafter and I dropped by to see her. For my own information, I asked her if there had been a reconciliation. "No," she said without emotion, "not a chance." I explained how I had parried the question with the press and told her that I thought it best to continue handling the situation as I had, by simply maintaining indifference. She agreed that this seemed a sound policy.

To change the subject I brought up the party and, knowing her well enough by then, I didn't hesitate to say, "It was awful." "God-awful!" she answered. "You know what I did, I tried to sneak away but didn't make it."

"What you should have done," I said, "is to have called up the Marine Guard at the Embassy and told them you were lonely and wanted the boys over for New Year's. They would have been thrilled to death and you might have enjoyed yourself."

"Why the hell didn't you suggest that before?" she asked mournfully. "It's a wonderful idea."

"I'm sorry, I didn't think of it until now."

Then I asked, "Do you mean to say you stayed here all those days. Didn't you even try to sneak out once?"

She looked at me surprised. "Honey! Didn't you know?"

"Know what?" I was afraid some big story had missed me completely.

"Hell, I had measles. German measles. We couldn't have gone out if we wanted to."

## 3.

Thanks to the careful production planning of Mankiewicz and Johnny Johnstone, there were none of the usual last-minute shifts in the schedule that usually afflict the start of a picture, especially in Europe.

Ava had plenty to do: finishing up the fittings, posing for modifications in the statue and rehearsing, in front of a huge mirror installed in her home, the gypsy dance she would perform in the picture. It wasn't an especially complicated routine but Ava adored working at it, giving more time to it than was really necessary.

In contrast to Ava's first days in Rome, the late telephone calls, the trip to Madrid and the Sinatra siege, things seemed dull. A few tidbits, however, trickled through to me by way of inquiries from the press. One report had it that Sinatra's picture had been postponed for a couple of weeks and he intended taking advantage of the change in schedule by returning to Rome to resume his efforts at reconciling with Ava. This—praise Allah!—turned out to be false. More accurate was the

news that Ava's ménage would shortly be enlarged with the arrival from California of Beatrice Gardner, Ava's sister. Ava had talked to me about her constantly so that I had a fair idea of what she was like before she arrived some twelve hours late after a frantic trip. Obtaining accurate information about late airplanes is virtually impossible in Rome unless you doggedly maintain a vigil at the airport. This I did all night. It must have been seven or eight in the morning before I glimpsed Beatrice's golden hair and thick-lensed glasses. Although much older than Ava, Beatrice's resemblance to her sister struck me immediately. And there was a decided similarity in their personalities.

Beatrice greeted me warmly as though she had known me all her life. "I've lost every damned piece of baggage," she said almost laughingly. I was thunderstruck. I knew she was bringing things for Ava. I had made out the list—Hershey bars, popcorn, chewing gum, marshmallows, Jack Daniels whiskey, American soaps, Kleenex—dozens of items Ava wanted and which are packed up and moved wherever she goes.

But Beatrice was cool as a cucumber, assuring me that the thing to do at the moment was to head for town.

The sisters enjoyed an affectionate and excited morning reunion. Ava, evidently, hadn't gone to bed so was up and ready when Beatrice arrived, with coffee on the stove and a Gardner breakfast in the making. I gulped a quick cup and returned to the hotel for much-needed sleep.

Beatrice, I had been told, was a strong hand around the house, and this turned out to be true. She took charge from the moment she arrived. Between her sister and the princess, Ava would have enough company to keep her busy; anyhow, the picture was due to start shortly and that would help solve what I had come to recognize as Ava's major problem—what to do with herself in her spare time.

An indication that Corso d'Italia was scheduled to embrace another guest came when a reporter called to check a story that a bullfighter friend of Ava's was coming to Rome from Spain to

play a part in the picture. So abysmal was my knowledge of bullfighting that I asked for his name to be spelled out—Luis Miguel Dominguin.

I knew there was no part left for him unless he intended to do a bit. That seemed ridiculous, since he was an important matador and a millionaire. Italian stars Rossano Brazzi and Valentina Cortesa had been cast, composing with the American artists the small cast of principal players.

Not having seen him at Ava's or heard his name mentioned, I could safely say that I knew nothing about it. Curiously, that was the only call I received about Dominguin, although the report was 100 per cent correct. The Spaniard had indeed left Madrid and was installed at the Corso. He had been there some two weeks before I found it out myself.

Just then there was the business of meeting Humphrey Bogart and installing him at the Excelsior Hotel where he planned to stay for the duration of the schedule, explaining that the martinis were good there, that he could hobnob with the "Roman phonies," as he called the Via Veneto set, and that his favorite restaurant was around the corner. At it he could feast on steaks and ham and eggs. Bogie would as soon have been caught with a glass of water in his hand as a strand of spaghetti draped over a fork.

A windy rain drenched Rome the night Bogart was due and continued until the early hours of the morning when his delayed plane finally arrived. Knowing that not even the regular airport photographers would be on hand and the wire services could not promise men to cover him, I resorted to that old press agent's dodge of pressing my still men and some of the laboratory assistants into service, forming a complement of six to do the press honors.

The show didn't fool the wise old hand one bit. "No need to put on an act for me," he said firmly but with good humor. "I'm an old face around here. There's not going to be a great deal of

interest. It's all in the dame. We'll cook up a few odds and ends just to keep the old mug in the papers. But the play will be for Ava. How is she?"

I told him that as far as I knew she was fine. "Did you have a tough time with Frank?" he pressed on.

I tossed that one away by explaining that I'd not done anything about the visit beyond meeting Ava and Sinatra when they arrived. "What about them getting together?" he asked. I couldn't answer that either and I began to realize Bogie was pumping me.

Sensing that I was being deliberately evasive, Bogie laughed. "I like gossip," he said frankly. "I'm a busybody. I want to know about everything. You're the press agent and you're in the middle. You have to be friends with everybody. I don't. I like a little agitation now and then. It keeps things lively. Don't worry, I'll find out what's going on."

I shrugged my shoulders, figuring that if Bogie wanted to be an old busybody that was all right with me. At least he was forthright enough to admit it.

The production schedule for *The Barefoot Contessa* had been constructed around the idea of getting Bogart in and out of Rome as soon as possible; first, because his contract contained a stop date (which Ava's did not); secondly, both Mankiewicz and Johnny were concerned about his reliability, not having worked with him before.

Bogie, of course had become a victim of his own legend of irascibility. I had spent several days with him the year before during the filming of his own picture *Beat the Devil* on location at Positano and there certainly were no evidences there that Bogart was anything but meticulous about his work. I discovered too that he was or perhaps had become a genial fraud about his famed capacity for drinking, ordering martinis only with weak English gin when the stronger stuff, American, was easily available. And no one—at least no one I had ever seen—drowned a Scotch as he did.

As it turned out Bogie never missed a day, a call or a cue. It would be hard to imagine a more dependable actor.

Installing him at the Excelsior was little trouble. He was ready for bed, knew the hotel from previous visits, and his first order to the management was to request the installation of a double bed. "Betty's coming over in a few weeks," he explained, "and this is one marriage that isn't going to be ruined by separate sleeping."

With the arrival a day or two later of Eddie O'Brien and his charming wife, Olga San Juan, the principals were in town and the production ready to start. All the stars attended a party at the studio given by Rizzoli and Haggiag to celebrate the start of the picture, a custom as traditional in Italy as the closing-day party in Hollywood. The trio posed amiably with one another, with Mankiewicz, with Rizzoli, and no one, I knew, had a cheerier cast to work with than I. Moreover I liked every one of them personally. Heaven knows they were interesting.

Mankiewicz wisely shot the first few days without principals so that when the first star was scheduled to work (it was Ava) the crew would have integrated itself and be working smoothly.

As the day approached I discovered, to my horror, that I had scheduled an appointment for Frank Gervasi, a onetime *Colliers* war correspondent who had been assigned to write an *American Weekly* story about Ava's life and loves, a two- or three-parter which would carry her by-line. The Sunday supplement had offered to pay her a few thousand dollars for it. Ava had agreed and had already given Gervasi one interview.

Gervasi, a short, handsome man with a strong, swarthy face, impressive thick gray hair and a voice like the Voice of Experience, came to the apartment flanked by a stenographer and another writer, Bill Pepper, now Rome correspondent for *Newsweek*. The two slick, experienced newsmen really put Ava through the mill as Gervasi, in the parlance of "press agentry," forced her into the "confession bit"—that is, cajoling her into really letting down her hair and saying things she would never

want to see in print. As Ava talked and Gervasi probed, the whole thing became an embarrassing psychiatric session, a far cry from a correct newspaper interview. Naturally I never translated these feelings into words for Ava's ear and was glad I hadn't, for the instalment that came out of the interview was excellent and Ava couldn't have been more pleased. She, therefore, insisted on keeping the appointment.

I wasn't in favor of the idea because I was responsible to Mankiewicz even more than to Ava. He detested having his production interfered with and, correctly or not, he would view the idea of Ava's doing an interview on her first day as an intrusion.

But it was too late now and when it happened, the interview was worse than expected. Ava, hunched over in a chair, talked in low, husky tones of her girlhood and her unhappiness in Hollywood as though she were playing *L'Aiglon*. She became more morose by the minute, and after being in that frame of mind I could never imagine her capable of going down to the stage and playing a scene.

I fidgeted nervously through the sad conversation, longing for the moment when the assistant director would arrive with information about her call. He came, but only after an interminable time. Ava bade Gervasi and his sycophants good-by with such despair and tragedy in her face and voice I was sure she would break down and cry.

After depositing the trio in their car, I hurried back to the dressing room. As I climbed the steps the sound of a record player and a wild flamenco assailed my ears. It could only be coming from Ava's room. When I went in she was turning a few steps, clapping her hands, snapping her fingers, smiling gaily. I apologized for putting her through such a miserable ordeal. "It was nothing," she answered. "It did me good. I always have terrible first-day jitters and that damned interview helped me forget them."

Seconds later Ava swirled onto the sound stage, a vision in her bright red and gold gypsy costume, a large red Spanish

shawl over her shoulders. She walked directly to the setup behind the curtain of Maria's dressing room in the cheap Madrid cabaret where she danced nightly. Mankiewicz smiled his approval of the costume and for a few seconds I thought the Italian crew would burst out in applause. Ava was that breathtaking.

I knew they didn't because they were both afraid and incredulous. It didn't seem possible, after so many weeks of wondering if she would make the picture, that she was there. Then there was the furor she had created in the Italian press. Ava, to them, stood on an unreachable plateau and, now that she was really among them, seemed a fantasy.

Mankiewicz explained the scene, a shot of Ava's bare feet seen poking out from under the curtain, her toes wiggling to indicate she is locked in an embrace with a man. The rehearsals were over quickly. Mankiewicz called for the take. Ava flipped off her slippers and Jack Cardiff's camera began to hum.

Like everyone's my eyes were fixed on Ava's feet. But what I saw were not the glamorous, beautiful feet of one of the most gorgeous stars the screen had ever seen but two extremities as flat as any that ever walked from an army recruiting office, "rejected." But no other soul seemed to notice and I felt like the little boy in the fable of the emperor's clothes.

Prudently I kept the discovery to myself and wrote paeans of praise in my publicity copy about Ava's lovely toes and the tee-off of *Contessa*. Certainly it would never do for the world to hear about a flat-footed Ava Gardner.

Years later we were in Madrid, doing a fitting of her costumes for *On the Beach*, when Ava, characteristically, was working in her bare feet—darting from the bedroom to the living room of the mirror-lined suite which had been engaged for the job.

A well-known orthopedic surgeon dropped in for a visit and out of the blue he remarked, "Ava, do you know you've got flat feet?"

"What?" She whirled and turned on him. "I've got flat feet!"

Show me!" By this time I was rolled up with laughter. She turned on me and, laughing herself, exclaimed, "And what's so funny about flat feet?"

"Wait," I answered. "I'll tell you in a minute. Let's hear what the doctor has to say!"

The surgeon, using a small pencil, marked off Ava's arch, contrasted it with that of another woman present and showed Ava the flatness of her feet. "Well, I'll be damned!" was all she could muster. "After all these years I've got flat feet. I'll be damned!" Turning to me, "And what's your story now? It better be good."

I took off my shoes and socks and asked the doctor to look at them. "How about these? They're flat too but not as bad as Ava's, are they?"

The doctor agreed and then I told her of the first day's shooting of *Contessa* and how I recognized what was wrong with her feet because I had the same trouble.

"And you never told me. You are a bum, the worse kind of a bum," she laughed. "After all these years. Flat feet! I'll be damned!"

The quiet launching of *The Barefoot Contessa* surprised everyone but Mankiewicz, who had planned it that way.

But the biggest surprise was Ava herself. So many dreadful things had been said about her, all of them accepted as fact, that the crew, the wardrobe department, make-up, the entire company, expected the worst. But none of their apprehensions came true. They found Ava invariably on time, always ready for the set call and a model of politeness to everyone.

Despite this and the warmth and friendliness she projected, they never lost their awe of her. One reason, of course, lay in the fact that Ava did not fraternize on the set. This was hardly a novelty to the Italians. Their own stars live in an astral world which few commoners enter.

Regardless of what seemed to be Ava's quiet, straightforward

manner at work, her meticulous behavior did not prevent an assistant director from blanching when Mankiewicz asked him to summon Ava from her dressing room to read some off-stage lines in the cabaret scene that was filmed during the first week of work. The assistant began to stutter a protest, but Mankiewicz was too preoccupied with other matters to notice it.

I could well understand the assistant director's terror, for in Italy stars of Ava's stature simply do not read off-stage lines. This work is done by an assistant director or any minor player who happens to be handy. I know that it took the assistant much longer to reach her dressing room with the message than it did Ava to return. To Metro-trained Ava, it was all part of the job as she screwed herself into an uncomfortable position out of camera range and read the dialogue.

The scrapbook of the *Contessa* began to bulge impressively as the clippings poured in from all over the world. In the United States, barely a week passed in which we did not have a break in the wire services. I soon realized that not enough pictures of Ava could be photographed to meet the demand, so many were the requests. There was even a fear we might go so far overboard with production publicity that the picture would wear out its welcome before its release.

Although Bogart huffed about her standoffishness, the splendid first impression Ava made on the set continued. It annoyed him that she never mingled with other players or with the crew. When not needed on the set, she quietly retired to her portable dressing room and slept.

She had few visitors. Beatrice, for instance, never came to the studio, explaining she couldn't stand the boredom of "waiting around" which is a part and parcel of movie making.

One day I saw Luis Miguel chatting animatedly with Ava. However, I went out of my way not to meet him, firm in my resolution to steer clear of being aware of Ava's personal relationships. The press continued hating me for this attitude, but it was a wise one and served me well.

Oddly there had been relatively few inquiries about the relationship between Miguel and Ava until one day a man appeared in my office demanding that he be allowed to photograph the two together. I explained that it was impossible for the simple reason that neither Ava nor Miguel desired their relationship to be publicized. He pointed to the speculation that was rife in the newspapers and finally, leaning across the desk, whispered in confidential tones that if his request were not granted he would release a photograph he possessed showing Ava in the company of a well-known Roman drug peddler taken at an after-hour spot.

I suggested he bring a copy of the picture for me to show to Ava and discover her reaction. Naturally, he never appeared again.

How Ava and Luis Miguel escaped the cameras of Rome's horde of photographers is a mystery to me to this day. They went out frequently together and I constantly heard reports of the nocturnal gatherings of the Gardner ménage at various Rome bistros.

Besides Beatrice and Luis Miguel, there was Mrs. Doreen Grant staying at Corso d'Italia, an old friend of Ava's who came to visit her from Madrid and lengthened the stay from a few days to the entire time Ava remained in Rome. Miguel had found himself an English tutor who also became part of the family. Walter Chiari, although his revue continued to play in Rome, evidently had quietly withdrawn from the neighborhood.

As a matter of fact the Roman photographers who, in recent years, have caught Ava in dozens of off-guard moments found her only once during *Contessa*—dancing at the Cabala, the Rome night spot she put into headlines in 1959 when she fled through the kitchen to avoid photographers.

In 1954 Ava was not nearly so camera shy and the dancing picture, wacky and cute, delighted her. Nor was she then so unwilling to permit outside cameramen on the set. Originally

*The Barefoot Contessa* had been closed to all but our own photographers, but pressure from the Italian publications and the Italian partners rose to such proportions that I was compelled to allow one or two to slip in. One Italian snapped a gorgeous shot of Ava in street clothes taken after she had changed from her costume. It made a lovely magazine cover and pleased Ava.

Moreover, Ava's contract did not grant her approval of stills. Nominally I could distribute pictures on the basis of my selections but I extended Ava the courtesy of submitting them to her first. One set showed her in a black bathing suit wearing dark glasses. I thought the photos perfectly awful and had rejected them although I knew it was unlikely we would ever get Ava into the costume again. On seeing them, she scrawled an initial of approval across the back. "These will go," she told me confidently. With some misgivings I released the photographs, and no single break paid off more handsomely. Later I told her how I had felt, that they had been rejects. Ava laughed. "Mother knows best. You bring the stuff to me. I can tell you what they'll like."

*The Barefoot Contessa* required two locations, the first on the Italian Riviera at San Remo, the other at Portofino.

Ava had scenes in both of them. Bogart was needed only at Portofino, so he took advantage of the free week by heading there as soon as the production closed down in Rome. Lauren Bacall had arrived by then, bringing with her a cake for Ava, a gift from Frank Sinatra, which she had nursed across the continent and over the ocean. Betty delivered it personally to Ava's apartment, but after this brief encounter they did not meet again.

Although outwardly they were cordial and polite and Ava would laugh on the set at Bogie's jokes, no great love was lost between the two stars, and Betty, belonging to the Bogart side of the picture, promptly fell under Ava's displeasure.

Bogie, on his part, thought little of Ava as an actress, con-

sidering her an expressionless automaton who simply followed—and not too well at that—the movements of the camera. He complained of her everlasting habit of checking her make-up and hair right before the take. "She gives me nothing," he complained. "I have to lift her every time." Often, Bogart deliberately muffed a line when he felt a scene was not playing as it should.

Ava, no amateur at movie making, realized what was going on and resented it, but she never uttered a complaint to Mankiewicz.

Bogie never failed to make remarks about Ava's personal life when she was within hearing distance and even to her face. If there was a newspaper reference to Luis Miguel or to Sinatra he made certain that it was brought to her attention. Ava bore the shafts with rare good humor and never once publicly displayed her inner feelings.

Ava's entourage followed her to San Remo in the car, Ava having taken the train with the rest of the company so she could sleep through the trip. At one station, though, she popped out of the compartment to buy something from a platform vender and the train pulled out leaving Ava still there. Someone pulled the emergency brake—a crime penalized in Italy as in America with a stiff fine. The Italians, however, thought the episode delightful as they ran alongside the star and hoisted her onto the train which had traveled a few hundred feet beyond the station.

Ava and her chums installed themselves in a couple of suites and except at work very little was seen of her. Evenings she could be glimpsed fleetingly leaving the hotel in a dazzling assortment of evening gowns as she dashed through the hotel lobby on her way to the Casino at Monte Carlo—her entourage trailing her by yards.

Keeping up with Ava's stride, I had learned, was a man-sized job and it was reassuring to note that even fleet-footed Luis Miguel found it a challenge. Ava didn't run, but her

stride would leave a gazelle breathless. When she was in top form, beautifully dressed and on her way out for an evening, it was a beautiful sight, made so by her superb carriage and the knowledge that she was always being watched. It was as artfully projected as a theatrical entrance and exit!

Mario, her driver, had long since trained himself to anticipate Ava's impatience at delay of any sort. He always found convenient places to park and often as not would have the motor started before she entered the car.

A crisis occurred in the production department when Ava's double for a bathing sequence in the cold Mediterranean (it was February) abruptly canceled her contract, saying she could not endure the freezing temperature. No substitute could be found and Mankiewicz had almost decided to eliminate part of the sequence showing Ava swimming and rely instead on a close-up shot of Ava appearing to come out of the water.

Hearing of the defection Ava sent word to the production: "Lump the double. Who needs her? I'll do the whole thing myself." And she did.

San Remo was the site of a spectacular publicity stunt that fell into my lap when the small sailboat containing Ava, Mankiewicz, Rossano Brazzi, Marius Goring, Valentina Cortesa and her husband, Richard Basehart, did not return to the harbor on schedule. As darkness began to fall I could see a story in having them "lost at sea." Its success depended completely on what kind of news picture my photographer could make when the boat landed.

I discovered what was really happening—the craft had drifted farther than calculated during the day's shooting and could not return faster because of its small motor. Nevertheless I planted the idea of a "lost at sea" movie company by means of anonymous phone calls to Milan and Genoa, saying the boat was long overdue, that it had been expected back in the middle of the afternoon.

When finally it arrived, no later than eight in the evening, the photographer was in position. Out of the darkness we could hear a voice singing and it had to be Ava's. As the boat hove into sight she was standing right in the middle, dressed in a white bathrobe, her eyes hidden behind dark glasses, singing her head off, and riding the waves with the aplomb of the Ancient Mariner navigating Central Park Lake.

The picture was superb and the cameraman caught it to perfection—Ava, looking a regal mistress of the sea, the others, Brazzi, Basehart and Valentina Cortesa, miserable. Valentina was bent over holding her stomach, obviously bemoaning her seasickness.

The next morning, armed with prints, I drove through a pouring rain to Cannes and planted the story with Associated Press. The photo and story made front pages all over Europe; the story also hit America. (Unfortunately for me, by the time the photograph reached the States, the phoniness of the stunt had become too transparent for wide usage.)

Later, Valentina Cortesa jokingly threatened to kill me if ever she saw it again. Ava, however, didn't complain—as well she couldn't. She looked divine.

The papers in San Remo and Genoa made a few tart comments about the American press agent trying to pull the wool over people's eyes, but they didn't beggar the point as they justifiably could have. Nevertheless it seemed wise for me to leave town, so I decided to join Bogart and Betty Bacall at Portofino. The break would afford an opportunity to collect some material on him and to shoot some informal pictures of the couple on the lovely Portofino Bay.

Bogart, tanned and cheery from the week in the sun, was ready to go to work. We rented a boat, sailed around the harbor and made photographs. As always, he was hungry for gossip, wanting to know everything about Ava and Miguel.

A couple of days later the troupe arrived—*sans* Ava. Since shooting was to start early next morning and she was sched-

uled for the very first setup, I began worrying about her. But I was the only one. There were so many preparations to be made that the rest of the company seemed oddly unconcerned. What bothered me mainly was how many of the entourage would arrive with her. There was not a bed to be had in the first-class hotels. *Contessa* had taken over everything. The secondary establishments were filled with grips and technical workers.

Portofino, moreover, swarmed with photographers who had come from Rome, Milan, Genoa—literally from everywhere in Italy all with one idea in mind—to photograph Ava, if possible with Luis Miguel.

Knowing this would not set well with her, I stayed up long after everyone else had retired, even outwaiting one photographer who had taken up a position in a tree near the hotel driveway. Shortly after midnight the Cadillac, with Mario at the wheel, rolled up swiftly and looking inside, I breathed a sigh of relief. There was Ava alone.

She explained that the others had gone on to Florence by train, that Mario would drive the car there in the morning and she expected to join them. After Portofino, she would be free for a couple of days. I took her to her room, explained that the town was alive with photographers and volunteered to stay with her constantly during the location, which consisted of a day and a half's work.

During the next forty-eight hours I began to have some realization of what Ava was forced to endure at the hands of photographers. Their relentlessness can be fierce; they never stop, always looking for that one wonderful shot they hope will win them fame and fortune. In being snapped so much myself I began to feel even crankier than Ava said she was—although she never showed it, certainly never to the cameramen—as we raced back and forth across the square, in and out of the car, and in and out of the hotel.

Only once did her composure break—during a scene when

people with cameras put themselves into the line of vision. She complained to Mankiewicz, who shooed an assistant director off to move them away.

When the scenes were finished, Ava promptly announced she was headed for Florence and proposed taking the train. I objected, saying that there would be a riot, that she couldn't possibly travel alone. Ava said she knew how to disguise herself, that she had done it before. "Did it work?" I asked. "No, never. I guess I'm just too big," she laughed.

"Very well then," I said, "we'll do it this way. I'll get a car, the best I can. It won't be a Cadillac, probably a little Fiat. There's nothing else available. I'll go with you and then catch a train from Florence to Rome." She agreed after I further explained that the train trip would take her twice as long as by car.

We set a time to start the next morning. Bogart and the others were in the lobby waiting to be moved to the train.

"Why do you fuss so over that dame?" he growled. "Why don't you leave her alone? Can't she get to Florence without you tagging along?" It was all said in that pugnacious manner Bogie knew could get under people's skin.

But I had learned one thing about Bogie—to snarl right back was smarter than cowing. "I'm going to Florence because I'm the only one in the company who is free to do it. And I think if Betty were in Italy alone making a picture and wanted to go to Florence you would appreciate my doing the same thing for her."

Bogart, wearing his hat in the lobby because he was without his hairpiece, snapped the brim as he did in the movies and said evenly, "*Touché*. I guess you're right."

Ava flew into the lobby carrying the odds and ends of boxes and little packages that I came always to associate with her and we were off in a jiffy in the tiniest of cars. The bits and pieces filled every bit of floor space and the empty seat beside the driver. To add to the mess I insisted not only on carrying a bot-

tle of cognac but a flask of Chianti. "I never travel anywhere in Europe," I explained, "without cognac and chocolate. They give you quick energy."

As the car rolled down the hill, the photographers snapping frantically, I looked at Ava. "We certainly gave the boys a treat. Look at us. We're a couple of bums, and you—you haven't even buttoned your pants."

Ava looked at her slacks and gasped—the buttons on one side were wide open. "What the hell. What difference does it make? I think the trip is going to be fun."

And it was! The day couldn't have been more beautiful. The Italian sky was bluer than ever. The little car maneuvered the hills much better than a large one would have.

No one recognized Ava when we stopped several times for lunch and refreshments, I toddling behind her, carrying the dilapidated black jewel bag.

It was an all-day trip and some eight or ten hours passed before I deposited Ava at the Excelsior Hotel in Florence. I did not realize this was the first of thousands of miles we would travel together. At the end of that year alone we counted 52,000 and in the years that came after there were too many to tabulate.

## 4.

Since my long, useless fingers could never manage to uncork the Chianti properly or even remove the cap of the cognac bottle, Ava took charge whenever I decided to have a slug. She drank nothing along the trip, saying she was waiting for cocktail time at Florence.

I had been around Ava long enough to realize she was anything but laconic, but I never expected that conversation would

flow uninterruptedly throughout the whole time we were on the road. We never stopped talking for an instant.

She was in a mood for reminiscing and as she rambled on I could feel that of all the periods in her life she seemed most attached to her childhood, seeing in it happiness and contentment that, despite the poverty of her family, she had not known since.

And as she talked on and on about life in North Carolina and her family I discovered that the straightforward biography that had come from Metro when Ava was signed was correct, that there had been no attempt to gloss over her humble beginnings or to color even the slightest detail about her life before she came to Hollywood, except for a polite fraud about the name of the place of her birth.

Ava was not, as is commonly believed, born at Smithfield, North Carolina, but in an outlying area of the town called Grabtown. For years I thought Grabtown was simply a nickname Ava and Beatrice had given the neighborhood in which they lived. But this is not the case. It is a real place and long before her movie career had started, Ava decided Smithfield sounded better as a birthplace.

However, once a studio publicist suggested that she refer to her father as a farmer. She became indignant. "He wasn't a farmer. He was a sharecropper."

Pictures of Ava's father, Jonas Gardner, show him to have been a lean, sinewy man with the strong characteristics of his Irish-Scotch ancestry. He died when Ava was only twelve but her memories of him were as vivid as though she had seen him yesterday.

"He did everything slowly, so deliberately and so well. There wasn't an impulsive bone in his body. He used to make us lemonade and I can see him now, sitting at the kitchen table, rubbing the lemons hour after hour so they'd be soft and the juice would literally pour out of them when he finally got around to that part of the operation. The kids' tongues would be hanging

out by the time the lemonade was finished but I've never tasted anything like it. No booze was ever so good."

Ava was born on Christmas Eve in 1922, and they baked two cakes that day—a custom that has been continued through the years. Even if Beatrice is not with Ava at Christmas time, she still makes the two cakes and ships them wherever her sister may be—one white cocoanut, the other chocolate; both according to their mother's recipe.

Evidently Mary Elizabeth Gardner was exactly the opposite of her slow, taciturn husband. Her pictures show a large, round, friendly woman and you can see immediately that Ava's remarkable beauty comes from her. They share the same wonderful complexion and bright, laughing eyes. Mary Elizabeth must have been a beauty.

For the large Gardner clan (Ava was the last of a family of one boy and four girls) life was a ceaseless struggle against poverty. But Ava remembers those impoverished days as a time when the family bond was strong and sturdy, when everyone pitched in to help.

"Everyone but me," she mused, regretfully. "I never did much. I didn't help my mother the way I should have. I'd get out of doing the dishes. I can see her now, cleaning every room every day as though she were expecting Sunday visitors. But I never offered to help her. I should have, I suppose, and now I wish I had."

After the death of her husband, Mary Elizabeth took in boarders to help keep the wolf from the door; and hold it at bay she did. Certainly her brood never wanted for good food. To hear Ava describe her, there was never a cook like her mother who, she remembered, could be found in the kitchen from early morning until late at night, constantly whipping up cakes and pies, Southern fried chicken, biscuits, hams, sweet potatoes done with burnt sugar and marshmallows, and barbecued meats that melted away from the bones.

"Everything else about our house was neat and clean," Ava

recalled, "but the kitchen always looked as though a hurricane had just swept through it. I cook like Mama, just throw things around and make a helluva mess. But, let me tell you, out of that mess came food. Even her fried eggs were better than anyone else's and as for hominy and grits—well, you never tasted anything like them."

From her own account and those of friends who knew her in her sharecropping days Ava was a beautiful but terribly shy girl. Although other girls of her age started dating, Ava seemed afraid of boys. She talked of how difficult it was to summon up the courage to go on her first date, a school prom, how she fled when, at the doorstep, the boy tried to kiss her.

Adolescence bewildered her. It was strange and odd. She knew she should have interests and enjoy life as all the other girls around her were doing.

She told me how embarrassed she felt day after day at school wearing a sweater. "I had only two," she said, "the one that was on me and the other in the wash. All I wanted to do then was to die."

Nothing in her previous experience ever prepared her for the fairy-tale drama and the fabulous change in her fortunes that happened when she visited New York and was photographed by her brother-in-law Larry Tarr, then married to Beatrice. He hung the photo in his shop and it was seen by an MGM talent scout who sent it to Hollywood with no comment. He knew the magnificent girl would sell herself. The studio wired back immediately: TEST HER.

Neither the biographies nor even Ava mention the genius in Ava's career, the director of the test who, on hearing Ava's sugar-and-molasses Southern accent, decided to make the test without sound. He simply photographed the gorgeous seventeen-year-old girl, posed her languidly, concentrating on her striking head, for, at that time, Ava's figure still possessed adolescent fat.

The trick worked and Ava went off to Hollywood with Bea-

trice along in the roles of nurse, companion, mother, duenna and secretary. Her contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was the customary deal starlets received at that time—fifty dollars a week and automatic raises every six months over a period of seven years.

It was such an ordinary contract that even Ava's twelve weeks' layoff was normal. It happened all the time then in Hollywood when all the studios kept stables of young people on hand to play small roles, gambling that one in a hundred might make it to the top. Big studios could afford both the investment and the indifference. Consequently, new talent was picked up and dropped as casually as a croupier deals cards across the black-jack table.

Although the people at MGM were ecstatic about Ava's beauty, her Southern accent threw them for a loss. The first course of action was to get rid of it. Ava was put in the hands of a diction teacher. Being bright and capable of learning quickly, she soon developed the lovely diction she has today, clear and correct without sounding pedantic. Even when she swears, the words are pronounced distinctly.

There was not much else to do with Ava. Her teeth are nearly perfect but it was suggested that she wear caps over her two front teeth for close-ups. Ava dutifully trotted the caps along for every picture but has seldom been known to use them. Nature slimmed her down—she didn't need to diet—and the voluptuous figure now known all over the civilized world was ready to begin its rise to prominence.

It cannot be said that Ava's climb to stardom was meteoric. It wasn't. It came slowly, with much trial and error—and without any appreciable hard work. "I know I've given very little to this business," Ava used to say in moments of introspection. "I've never really worked hard at it because I didn't seem to have to. It all came so easily. Maybe that's why I don't appreciate it now. Maybe if I had had to work harder to get to the top I'd think

more about it. Maybe I could take that 'price of fame' line more seriously."

Considering this, it is as well that Ava took longer to develop into an actress than her more ambitious and dedicated confreres. Fame demands selflessness and responsibility, neither of which shows materially in Ava's character.

Nor was getting married a problem to her. The kingpin at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was Mickey Rooney, a pint-sized but brilliant actor, a mummer in the best traditions of the word who could sing and dance, who could play dramatic roles, beat the drums, be an acrobat—do just about everything his craft demanded. He had had a reputation for courting girls taller than himself, so when Ava arrived on the lot she was built to his specifications. They started to go out together and, never one to hide his conquests under a bushel, Mickey saw to it that Ava was found in his company as often as possible. They became regulars on the Hollywood night-club circuit.

Ava's friendship with Rooney immediately produced a number of snide insinuations in the theatrical columns, inferences that she was using Rooney as the steppingstone to her own ambitions. Nevertheless, she weathered them as her romance with Mickey grew deeper. He was the first boy she had ever fallen in love with and everything about him seemed to be just perfect—his marvelous talent, his bright, bubbling personality, the attentions he showered on her and his obvious pride in her beauty. She was ready and eager to say yes when, after a whirlwind courtship, he proposed.

"We were children," she said over and over again in recalling the marriage. "We never had a chance. Do you know that Metro sent a press agent along with us when we went to Carmel on our honeymoon? He slipped Mickey five dollars and told him to take me to a drug store and buy me a soda."

Mickey's family had always played a large part in his life, and they were as far removed from Ava's world as night and day.

Mickey's father, Joe Yule, was one of the greatest of the burlesque comedians and although his fame existed in a smaller theatrical orbit than his son's, he did not need to trade on Mickey's fame. Yule's name was up in lights at the Follies Theatre in Los Angeles for years before and after Mickey became a film star for the second time in the mid-thirties. Mickey had been a headliner as a little boy, starring in two-reel comedies under the name of Mickey McGuire.

Ava's possessiveness and Mickey's preoccupation with his career stood between what little chance the marriage had of success. She disliked sharing Mickey with his family and with the chums that had been so important in his extraordinary young life. He was too young to take the responsibilities of marriage seriously. Mickey belonged to the world of grease paint. Ava was only a visitor to it—a reluctant one, at that.

Ava kept hoping that Mickey would settle down, but his friends continued to preoccupy him. Ava felt rejected. After a little over a year of married life, the inevitable happened—they were divorced. There was no financial settlement, since Ava's career was on the upgrade. Gradually she was being rewarded with roles that showed more than her looks and required some degree of acting ability.

As the car drew closer to Florence, Ava stepped out of her "long ago" mood and began to talk animatedly about Luis Miguel. Without my prompting, she said firmly, as if seeking to reassure herself, "No, I'm not going to marry him. But he's fun and I love having him around. I guess I like him because he doesn't need me. He's not looking for publicity like so many of the men over here. He's willing to stay in the background and that's not easy for a man—you know that. I think they snapped one picture of us at the Casino. But it couldn't have been any good. I looked for it and didn't see it."

Ava's appreciation of Luis Miguel made sense in the light of what she told me and what I knew about her husbands. Mickey Rooney obviously adored her as a conversation and show piece.

Artie Shaw overwhelmed and frightened her with his intellect, and Frank Sinatra had, as she frequently said, "gone and gotten successful again and become his old arrogant self. We were happy when he was on the skids."

Luis Miguel fitted into none of these categories. He had retired as a bullfighter. His family had always held large landholdings and he had established a fine business as a breeder of bulls. He was well off and prosperous, young and handsome enough to pick and choose his women friends. He did not need to be linked with Ava to achieve either fame or money.

I sensed that Ava felt free to be herself with him, that he didn't inhibit her and attached no importance to her caprices, enjoying her charm and not disturbed by her outbursts of temperament. One thing is certain, their relationship never assumed the hysterical dimensions of Ava's next attachment, her long, international and widely publicized romance with Walter Chiari.

As the car turned into the hotel driveway in Florence I surveyed the results of our tenure in the car. Not two people, it seemed, had made the trip but a whole band of gypsies. It was a mess and so were we. Ava's slacks were dusty and wrinkled, but at least buttoned, as we piled things into each other's arms and directed the porter to get the luggage out of the back. Ava put on her dark glasses, and we headed for the reception desk, asking for Beatrice who had registered under another name. Our English, of course, invited curiosity and I know the American tourists crowded into the lobby considered us a disgrace to flag and country.

As the elevator climbed leisurely upstairs the young operator turned to the porter. "Do you know, Ava Gardner is expected here any minute?"

Ava and I eyed each other. There simply was no way of keeping a secret in Italy. The remark meant only one thing—the press would be after her within minutes.

We found Beatrice's room and Luis Miguel, also booked un-

der another name, joined us there shortly. I was introduced to him for the first time. Despite tutoring, his English was hopeless and, after considerable floundering, we ultimately solved the linguistic problem by my speaking French in Ava's behalf. She could understand the Spanish in which he replied.

Ava had decided we would all change and that I would meet her in about half an hour. Then she and I would go to the bar, cater to whatever press showed up. After a decent time we would beg to be left alone and Luis Miguel could join her. Ava wanted me to spend the evening, but I protested that I had to return to Rome to prepare for the arrival of Bessie Love.

"Who's Bessie Love?" Ava asked in a voice indicating she ought to know.

"Who's Bessie Love?" I pretended shock. "And you the second oldest living Metro actress? [The oldest, in point of service at the time, was Lana Turner.] Why, she was queen bee of Metro before you were born. Don't you remember *Broadway Melody*?"

Ava nodded.

"Well, then you've seen her. She was in it with Charlie King and Anita Page."

"Anita Page!" she exclaimed. "That beautiful blond girl? I adored her. Where is she?"

I told her what I knew of Anita, that she had long since left the screen, married a naval officer and had become every man's idea of what a lovely, stunning naval officer's wife should be.

"Lucky girl! I envy her!" said Ava. "I wish that would happen to me."

"Anyhow," I explained, "I think I can get a good break on Bessie. She hasn't made an American picture for years. I've drummed up some interest in her, but must do a bit more before she gets here. When she arrives I'm going to drive her right to the set and get a picture of the two of you. It will be a good story. Two old Metro actresses meeting in Rome."

"You bum!" Ava shook her finger. "It's just like you to write

a caption that way—as if the papers aren't bad enough. You get changed and be back here when you're ready."

I borrowed a fresh shirt from Luis Miguel, somehow managed to look presentable, collected Ava and escorted her to the bar, just off the lobby. There were about half a dozen reporters and an equal number of photographers—less aggressive than their Roman counterparts, but persistent nevertheless. We chatted and posed for pictures.

I explained that Ava had stopped off for a brief visit with her sister. I identified myself carefully as the press agent for the picture and carefully spelled out my name.

They seemed satisfied although one photographer followed us into the lounge and we tried to please him. Finally, I waved him away with an outstretched hand. "That's the one they'll print," Ava sighed, as the cameraman snapped the gesture and darted off.

Out of the corner of our eyes we had seen Luis Miguel skip in through another door. As the press retreated he joined Ava. If I moved quickly, I could catch the next train to Rome, so with a minimum of ceremony I said good-by and left them.

The spadework for Bessie Love had paid off. I had circulated a biography about the former star and was agreeably surprised to find all the wire services and a good section of the Italian press willing, even eager, to do pictures.

Bessie was delighted at the reception. She gaily got up onto the fender of a car to do the leg shot, just as in the old days. And it was reassuring to see her legs were as shapely as ever.

By this time Ava had returned to Rome; evidently her night out with Miguel had passed without incident. The "plot" had worked and after my departure, the press had left her alone.

Ava was working on a scene at Villa on Monte Parioli. It was a short sequence and she had little to do but chase Warren Stevens around the courtyard with a butcher knife, a scene that was ultimately dropped from the picture. I arrived with Bessie in tow and found Ava in an unusual setting for her—sitting

with the crew, regaling them with our adventures from Portofino to Florence.

She was dressed in a white towel bathrobe and greeted Bessie Love warmly. "So you're Bessie Love. Well let me tell you, you must have something. David gave me up in Florence just to meet you."

Ava's being in the bathrobe worried me. I knew she liked to be dressed for photographs, however informal. On the other hand I didn't want to keep Bessie Love hanging around the set while she changed. So I braved the dragon and asked Ava if we could take the shots right away. "Of course," she said. "Why not?"

We called the still man, grabbed some photographs and another fine break was in the making for *Contessa*—Bessie and Ava, stars of two generations meeting against the colorful background on one of Rome's fabled hills.

I drove Bessie back to the Excelsior, installed her there, dropped the rolls of film by the laboratory and went out to my office at Cinecitta. There were several calls from one of the news services. I couldn't understand why they should be so impatient about the photos of Bessie and Ava. The story wasn't that good.

The call, it turned out, had nothing to do with that day's work but with my appearance as Ava's escort in Florence.

"Could you come right over?" said the picture editor. "We have a shot here of someone with Ava that we think is you but the Florence office swears it's Luis Miguel. As a matter of fact it has already been printed in London."

"I don't need to come over," I answered. "Tell me one thing. Is the man waving his hands and looking mean?"

"Yep, that's him."

"Well, then" it's me."

"Oh!" was the disappointed reaction over the phone. "Well, it was worth a try anyhow."

"Yes," I said, "I know it's me. Those newspapermen in

Florence knew I wasn't Dominguin. But they didn't want to believe it—that's what happened."

A week or so later the clipping arrived from London. There was I, large and forbidding, waving angrily at someone not pictured, and Ava looking sullenly straight ahead at a vase of flowers on the table. The caption said that this was Ava doing Florence with her current boy friend, former bullfighter Luis Dominguin.

The locations in the north occurred about halfway in the shooting schedule of *Contessa* and after the company returned to Rome the final weeks sped by quickly. Ava enlivened the publicity campaign by appearing as a surprise model at a Roman spring fashion show, wearing a gown which, of course, we called "The Contessa."

On the set, Ava remained true to character, rarely mixing with anyone although visited a little more frequently by Luis Miguel.

Two publicity stories upset her. The first was Frank Gervasi's yarn which appeared in *The American Weekly*. The text had been completely altered since Ava had seen it and was now a scathing diatribe, a psychological probing of a confused girl, describing Ava, among other things, as being a refugee from a psychiatrist's couch. It had been a bold-faced double cross, and I was shocked that someone of Gervasi's stature would do it.

The other came about when the Italian newspapers suddenly decided to create a feud between Ava and Gina Lollobrigida. It was utterly without foundation and happened because Humphrey Bogart had invited Gina out to the set just as he had Sylvana Pampanini a few weeks before. I showed Gina around and must have endeared myself eternally to her by calling her "Miss Pampanini."

Ava was not involved in the visit at all but, of course, I was hoping to get a picture of the two. Ava, however, was not called

back to the set in time and Gina left. On the basis of this the Italians decided she had snubbed Gina. It wasn't true, but, just as everything which has to do with Ava, the rumor shot across the wires and popped up dozens of times in the American columns. Ava was furious.

There was nothing to be done about it. There are no libel laws with teeth in them in Italy even if one is inclined to sue. The frankest explanation I have ever received for unreliable reporting in Italy occurred when a secondary paper, early in the run of *Contessa*, insisted Lauren Bacall was flying to Rome to protect Bogie from the predatory arms of Ava Gardner. I managed to force the paper into some kind of half-baked retraction while the editor moaned, "Well, I just couldn't get a story so I had to make one up."

With the end of the picture in sight, Ava grew more restless. She complained that she was bored with Rome and eager to get to Spain where she hoped to have a long rest.

During this period Ava lost some of her affection for Mankiewicz. He had made a simple remark to her about being a few minutes late, and because of her record for punctuality she resented it bitterly. Elephantlike, she never forgot the hurt, although she saw Mankiewicz afterward and was charming and friendly to him. .

The population at Corso d'Italia gradually began to dwindle. Mrs. Grant returned to Spain. Beatrice planned to leave for America. Luis Miguel had departed. Minus her chums, Ava seemed to be more dismayed than ever about how to spend her time. Fortunately Bob Haggiag stepped quickly into the picture by giving parties for her at his Parioli apartment and taking Ava on the rounds that she seemed to like, even to need.

Mainly, I was concerned with getting a still session of her. She had rejected overtures time and time again—so strenuously that I reread her contract and decided to put her on official call, to which the company was entitled.

I think I mentioned the word "call" to her just once and cer-

tainly with no sense of threat written into it. Ava was all attention and two nights later we were hard at work, at the first of many Ava Gardner still sessions I supervised.

Ava drew the plans. She would do the portraits late at night. "I'm awake then. I just can't do them in the morning." Then she added, "Set up a bar and arrange to bring out my record player and records." I put everything in order as requested and had the common sense to keep an extra car and driver handy for the last-minute things Ava would want.

Her demands sailed back and forth like a tennis ball as she took over the direction of the sitting. The driver dashed to Rome for Spanish combs. She remembered a bullfighter's jacket Luis Miguel had given her. That meant another trip. The records weren't jazzy enough, Ava complained after an hour or so. We dispatched the chauffeur for some different ones.

All the time, Ava worked like a Trojan in the dank, small room at Cinecitta that had been improvised as a portrait gallery. With amazing speed she whipped in and out of costumes, decided what angles suited her best and studied the lighting intently. When she slid into the bullfighter's coat, I knew this was it—that one wonderful picture. It still shows up repeatedly in magazine and newspaper stories about her. She even whipped off her slip to show her figure to better advantage in one form-fitting gown and slyly put vaseline in the crease in her bosoms to highlight them. The evening was a *tour de force*, and I could see that Ava was really at home in front of the still camera, that her affinity for it seemed to have been born in her. I had never before seen her more sure and confident.

Ava didn't attend the traditional production party that followed the end of shooting, although she should have. Bogart was there and so, of course, were Mankiewicz and Eddie O'Brien. Having kept her distance so long, Ava didn't seem to be a part of the company, and no one really missed her. However, she did attend a smaller party given by Rizzoli and Haggiag a day or two earlier—arriving breathlessly, flanked on either side

by two marines in dress blues. She winked at me. "Never forget a good idea. Look at my boys. Aren't they nice?"

The final item on her schedule was dubbing the dialogue for the location and outdoor scenes. Although Bogart worried about dubbing, complaining that he didn't like it, Ava promised she would "knock it off" in a day. Doubting this, Mankiewicz scheduled two. Actually the dubbed dialogue was finished up in a matter of hours.

Ava had long since been packed and ready to fly to Madrid. Haggiag and I were, as usual, the airport stalwarts. We found our familiar places at the bar, drank champagne and had ourselves a time. Ava was warm and affectionate to me although no mention was made of the possibility that we would meet again. I was happy to have her off my hands, even if it meant that I would be obliged to find new ways of publicizing *The Barefoot Contessa*. The pace would never be as fast as it had been.

*II.    L*et's Get the Show  
*on the Road*





AVA'S departure was followed by those of the Bogarts and the O'Briens. Betty and Bogie flew straight to New York: Olga and Eddie decided to do a little sightseeing in Europe.

Figaro, Inc., was back where it had started, consisting of Mankiewicz, Johnny Johnstone, Mike Washinsky and me. The others turned to the business of scoring and editing the picture, commuting between London and Rome, while I flew back to New York.

In the excitement of publicizing the picture around Ava, there remained a great deal of routine work to be done and this kept me occupied. Now and then reports about Ava from Madrid sifted into the columns. She was being seen everywhere with Luis Miguel and everyone assumed the romance was serious.

It was also reported that Ava was locked in a dispute with MGM and had been threatened with suspension. The studio, it was asserted, had ordered her to come back but she had refused.

When a news story came out of Spain saying that Ava was hospitalized with a kidney ailment, the gossip mongers really went to work and boldly accused her of playing possum in order to avoid returning to Hollywood.

Some weeks later, out of the blue, United Artists heard Ava was coming through New York on her way to the Coast. We decided to horn in on Metro's reception, a comparatively simple thing to do since discreet inquiry revealed that Metro's Eastern publicity department had been instructed to be cool to its distinguished star.

Ava was delighted to see me and evidently pleased that United Artists had come out to greet her. On leaving the airport she was asked to pose for TV. "Metro set it up," someone explained. "Metro!" she retorted. "Well, I don't do TV, especially Metro TV."

Ava had nothing on her agenda so we spent a surprisingly quiet day together. She wanted to know "all the dirt" and I told her what had appeared in the papers about her kidney indisposition, that the Hollywood columnists had insisted it was all a fake.

"Look at these," she said as she opened a suitcase and pulled out an envelope containing X-rays. She held the negatives up to the light and pointed to the good-sized stone. "I wish to hell some newspaperman had that in his kidney instead of me. Then he'd know what he was talking about."

I accompanied her to the airport that night and put her aboard a plane for Hollywood. "This is the last time, I promise you," she said reflectively. "I'm going to square things away out there and live in Europe. They leave me alone," she explained. "I've been around Spain so much that now they take me for granted."

Once again I said good-by, believing I had spent my last airport hour with Ava. I returned to work, keeping tabs on Ava only through the newspapers. Her suspension had become official shortly after her arrival on the Coast. Whereupon Ava headed for Lake Tahoe and took a house, presumably to establish Nevada residence and resolve her marital situation with Frank Sinatra.

By then, all the forebodings I felt about a lapse in the publicity campaign for *Contessa* had come true. The campaign was

sagging badly and the fact that this happens normally in the interval between a picture's completion and its release wasn't much consolation. The tremendous coverage it had received abroad made the slack more conspicuous than usual.

Moreover the rough cut of the picture had been seen by United Artists' brass, and the enthusiasm that marked its production had wilted. Relations between Figaro, Inc., and United Artists were definitely cool.

Nevertheless, *Contessa* was United Artists' big show to open the fall season. It boasted important stars, and the widespread publicity it received had built up enormous interest. Whatever the doubts about it, an all-out effort simply had to be made to put it over the top. A premiere at the Capitol Theatre in New York was scheduled for early in October.

In the planning for the premiere the obvious and best idea put forward was to enlist Ava's help by inviting her to attend the opening, preceded by the usual week of interviews, TV and radio appearances—the standard procedure when Hollywood stars visit New York for the premieres of their pictures.

How to get hold of Ava was the problem.

She was under suspension at MGM and that made her availability more likely; she would possibly be receptive to our overtures, if only to spite her studio. Because suspended stars and studios rarely talk to one another during contract spats, Metro refused to volunteer any information about Ava, her schedule and her whereabouts. I found out later that, during this interval, elusive Ava kept the studio as much in the dark about her comings and goings as she did everyone else. Newspapers supplied meager clues. She was hidden away in her backwoods house at Lake Tahoe. Columnists reported that bull-fighter Luis Miguel Dominguin and Howard Hughes had visited her. She had made only rare visits to Tahoe itself. No one knew her telephone number if, indeed, the house possessed a phone.

The newshawks, who had waited patiently for Ava to show

herself in court to testify in her complaint, were disappointed. They could only report that after completing her residence, Ava had left Tahoe on the very day she was supposed to appear. She could, however, return to Nevada and pick up the divorce papers at a later date.

It was assumed Ava had gone back to Hollywood, and United Artists decided the best way to ensnare her for the premiere was to dispatch me to the Coast to make the request personally. Within forty-eight hours, I was packed and on my way to Hollywood, feeling more like a wartime intelligence agent than a publicist, grateful, at least, that United Artists recognized this strategy as the only one capable of producing results.

I settled at the Sunset Towers and promptly put in a call to Ava's sister, Beatrice. When the idea was outlined to her, she reacted favorably, said that Ava very likely would be interested since she was foot-loose at the moment and, as always, bored. Beatrice said she would telephone Ava that evening and call me back afterwards.

Of course, Beatrice didn't reveal where Ava was—nor did I ask. The murky cloak-and-dagger atmosphere was too intriguing to be illuminated by anything so ordinary as a direct question.

The following afternoon I had a call from Beatrice, who said Ava wanted to talk to me immediately, that she was delighted I was around and still in the *Contessa* business. I was to telephone her right away. She was waiting by the telephone in Havana, registered under the name of Miss Grey.

In a few minutes it was old times again. We were chatting away, and I explained the proposal to her: that we knew she was available because of her dispute with Metro; that we needed her in New York for the opening. Ava spoke out frankly: "It sounds okay except I don't like New York very much. I'll call back tomorrow around this time."

The next day, right on the dot, Ava was there again and without frilly preliminaries got down to business.

"You know I've never been to South America, and this pic-

ture has such an appeal for Latins, why wouldn't it be a good idea to go there first—hit a few cities, do press conferences, interviews, etc.—have a ball—you know the jazz. Then we'll come into New York right before the opening. We'll start in Rio, then to Caracas. I have friends there."

No professional publicity man could have conjured a better idea. It was built to order for the picture and the premiere. I seized it quickly and after a series of telephone calls to New York, the junket was approved. I prepared to return to the East immediately to make arrangements to fly to Havana for Ava.

Arnold Picker, United Artists' foreign sales manager, worked out the itinerary which had to start on the east Coast of South America because in the very same week Brazil's President Vargas had shot himself and the country was under martial law. The schedule, as finished, led us from Havana to Florida, Lima, Santiago, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Rio. Picker eliminated Caracas because it added days when Ava would be required in New York.

This done, my immediate job was to write a form letter to all South American offices involved, explaining, to the minutest detail, the protocol for Ava's "good will" visit. A suite for Ava was presupposed as was a single, adjoining room for her maid and another for me.

At each city, Ava would appear at two receptions, one for civic and motion picture officials, the other for the press. These, I wrote, should be held very late in the afternoon, even in the early evening, because of the star's disinclination to early rising. "The ballrooms used," my white paper went on, "must be dimly lighted with an orchestra playing soft music throughout. The emphasis should be on informality so that Miss Gardner may move quickly from one group to another." Here the purpose was to prevent one reporter from monopolizing her—and Ava from saying more than she intended.

I explained there could be no television interviews because Ava's contract prevented them—a polite fabrication since Ava

was prohibited only from performing dramatic shows. But I understood Ava's reluctance to show herself on the small screen. I knew she would never risk a TV display filmed without the benefits of careful lighting and the very finest camera work.

I reached Havana late in the afternoon and found Ava at her hotel, pert, vivacious and full of chatter. She was dressing for a dinner date with Ernest Hemingway. "We'll work on the trip tomorrow," she said happily, dashing off for her engagement. "Go to the Florida. They have the best daiquiris in Havana."

Next day Ava snorted at the idea that a possible revolution should keep her from going to Rio. "I'm not afraid," she grumbled, "and as for Caracas we'll squeeze it in. I want to get to New York as late as I can."

Within hours the whole tour was put together. Ava and her maid fell busily to the job of packing and I turned to my usual occupation of counting valises, hatboxes, miscellaneous airline bags and just plain odds and ends of "wrapped things" that as frequently as not had been plopped into paper bags. I asked Ava for the keys to the baggage.

"Keys?" she exclaimed with astonishment. "Keys! I never had one in my life. It's all I can do to keep one for this damned jewel box," and she raised the old, familiar, battered black bag to illustrate her point.

When Ava's luggage was assembled and mine placed beside it, there could be no doubt in the mind of any casual onlooker that a family of gypsies was camping in the hallway. "We look like bums," I commented, and Ava agreed.

All through this bustle of activity, a young man hovered constantly in the background. He was somewhat above average height with a stocky build and crew cut—rather good-looking. He said very little but I noticed that whenever Ava asked him to do something, he jumped to attention and after finishing the task blended himself again unobtrusively into the furniture. Bill could have been his name and my communications with

him automatically reduced themselves to pleasantries—"good morning, good afternoon, and good night."

Not being a snooper I accepted him for what he was—the fellow who was always there. I may have thought fleetingly that he was a beau, but I decided that he was some kind of friend, a hanger-on she had picked up in Havana. There was no reason nor inclination to cultivate him.

We held a press conference in Havana before leaving for Florida to make the connection with the Braniff plane for Lima. Seats had been reserved for us in the front, and we piled up, carrying aboard Ava's make-up box, the battered jewel case, two or three suitcases with her changes, my typewriter, and at least half a dozen boxes and paper bags of varying sizes. "Bums," I muttered, "just bums." And Ava laughed delightedly.

We were already air-borne when someone from behind tapped my shoulder. I turned around to see Bill grinning a bit. "Hi! How are you?" I said as I turned around and nudged Ava. "Look, Ava, guess who's here. Bill."

"Sure, I know," she said disinterestedly, not turning her attention from the window. "He's always here." Bill was ignored for the rest of the short trip to Miami.

There we took a suite in a hotel to wait and freshen up. We were all hungry and decided to get some hamburgers, since room service had closed for the afternoon. Ava picked up the phone, asked for a number, and I realized she was calling Bill. "We need hamburgers—about half a dozen—as soon as you can." She hung up.

Within minutes, Bill was there, his arms loaded down with hamburgers—more than the four of us could eat in a week.

Still I hadn't fitted Bill into the picture, as much from lack of curiosity as that there were so many other things to do: call New York, check the reservations, arrange for limousine transportation, move the luggage to the airport, and the other odds and ends involved in getting our gypsy caravan on the road.

We were at the airport in plenty of time to meet and chat

with the Braniff people who, naturally, were thrilled at having Ava aboard—especially the hostesses. A couple of girls in the office remembered me from the misadventures of *The Americano* the year before.

Although Ava couldn't have spoken more than a dozen words to him since he produced the hamburgers, Bill hovered in the background, neither smiling nor sullen, more as an out-of-favor secretary anxious for something to do in order to prove himself. Ava casually shook hands with him as we climbed up the ramp and that, I thought, was the end of him.

As we turned around, pausing for one more photograph of the departure, the ground stewardess called up to Ava, "Don't let David get you into trouble in Brazil."

I laughed but not too brightly and Ava flipped back, "You needn't worry. I can make my own trouble without him."

Settled in our seats with packages strewn all over the front of the plane and overflowing the rear cloakroom, Ava and I quieted down and began an airplane talkathon that spanned seven years and a dozen countries.

It began with the stewardess' reference to *The Americano*, and I launched into that sorry narrative, placing particular emphasis on the exuberance of the Brazilians under normal circumstances and what we might expect in view of the turbulent situation. I warned her how Glenn Ford and Cesar Romero had literally been mobbed; how crowds by the thousands, not hundreds as in Europe and America, assembled outside hotels, making entrance almost impossible. I explained that they lacked discipline, that police were unable to control them.

Ava wasn't impressed. She didn't seem to care. So I put the whole situation out of my mind, figuring that getting to Lima was enough for the moment.

Looking backward I realize that none of us involved in the trip had the faintest idea of what we would find in South America—neither Ava nor I nor the people at United Artists. True, the company had sent stars on good-will tours before, but these

had followed the route of the key cities of the United States and the beaten paths in Europe, London, Rome, and Berlin. The mobbing of Glenn Ford and Cesar Romero stuck in my mind and worried me, for now I had to face the fact: I was personally in charge of Ava and directly responsible for her safety.

I knew the junket had been too quickly planned to be officially organized at the cities we proposed to visit. And I was aware too that no matter how well the arrangements were put together they would never accommodate Ava's capriciousness. So the wisest thing, it seemed, was to borrow a favorite phrase of Ava's—play it by ear.

It is a good thing I did, for never in my life had I seen such a huge crowd as packed every inch of the roped-off space, the verandas of the airport building and the field itself when the plane started to land at Lima. I could even make out the unmistakable regalia and instruments of a military band. Ye gods, I thought, that's more than I ever bargained for.

But this is going ahead of the story. That morning was the first I had ever seen Ava wake up—as warm and lovely a sight as is possible to imagine. In the remembrance of that event I have forgotten what my feelings were beforehand. Waking people up is never the pleasantest of assignments, both from the viewpoint of the waker and the about-to-be-awakened. So I surely must have felt some apprehension when I pulled the curtains apart and whispered, "Ava! It's time to get up."

I could see her figure moving in the blankets, a white arm wiggle out of the sheets and reach unhesitatingly for the switch. Pulling herself up as the light flashed on, her long black hair splashed all over the pillow, she opened her green eyes and smiled. "What time is it, honey?"

That was all she said, but it was as though she were reading the line from a beautiful scene in a picture. When I told her that we were within an hour of the airport and she would need every bit of it to get dressed and have breakfast, she laughed again and said, "Why don't you tell them to slow down?"

By that time she was wide awake and her marble-white skin, minus any sign of make-up, literally lighted up the berth. She was beautiful beyond belief. I rang for the stewardess and we asked for breakfast. I sat on the side of the berth and Ava took up the conversation at whatever point we had left it the night before. Her laugh filled the plane again and again and I wondered how anyone on earth could be so good-natured in the morning.

Ava's breakfast, I knew, embraced a wide range of items so the stewardess, having been told about them the night before, had everything ready—eggs, bacon, a small steak, coffee, orange juice, rolls, a glass of milk—in short, a normal Gardner meal.

When, at almost the same minute as I had, Ava caught sight of the military band, she looked at me and grabbed my arm. "Oh! No! Not that!"

The plane ground to a stop and we stopped looking at the thousands and thousands of expectant people and tried to pick out one face in the crowd surrounding the plane itself that might belong to United Artists. A short, impeccably dressed, serious-looking, white-haired man appeared who introduced himself as Mr. Lowenstein of United Artists. His name told me he was German (which he was), and I breathed a sigh of relief, for I knew he would have things as well under control as they could possibly be.

Thanks to him and his twenty-odd-year-old son, Lima turned out to be a happy introduction to the other America. Ava whisked happily through the crowd, which cheered and pelted her with flowers.

The band it turned out was waiting for the President of Peru, who was returning from a trip to another South American country and, exactly like such scenes in the movies, there was barely a soul at the President's plane, all attention being fixed on beautiful Ava. She waved gaily, posed for pictures, and our car careened through the streets with a police escort so fascinated with getting a sight of Ava that they were more hindrance

than help. But it was all part of the show and Ava hugely enjoyed catching their autograph books tossed into our car. She scratched away furiously because the police indicated they would collect them at the other end.

It was a shambles but such fun no one cared—least of all Ava. Ava was always safe, but from that moment on in Lima she was always in crowds. Although nervous she obviously relished them. At the press reception she had to be taken out of the room twice while announcements were made that she could not return unless there was some order. She danced with the newsmen and the United Artists executives. She posed for hundreds and hundreds of pictures and eagerly devoured the pages and pages of publicity that began with front-page coverage and ran right straight through every one of the papers.

Ava had always known of her tremendous popularity in South America because of the great amount of fan mail that came to her from there. "They like me," she explained, "because I look like one of them, Spanish." A showman to her finger tips, Ava began in Peru to wear her hair straight back, to deck it out with combs and to choose dresses that would accentuate her Latin appearance. The people loved it.

Time and excitement of the first week of our trip have blurred the details and, like the travelogue, we left Lima "all too soon," heading for the other cities on the itinerary.

Some incidents, however, were so vivid they could not be erased. In Buenos Aires we were met by the two directors of United Artists, who were literally shaking with nerves. I wondered what kind of report they had received from Mr. Lowenstein in Peru. He and Ava had gotten along beautifully. She had even sent him a telegram of thanks for his handling of the visit. Ava wasn't all that frightening. At dinner Ava whispered to me, "What's wrong with these men? They're so nervous. Let's get out of here." I made some excuse to leave them and we ate quietly and unrecognized at another restaurant.

Later an explanation of their jitters was forthcoming. They

had, on the very day we arrived, been hauled into court on a charge of defrauding a producer on film rentals. It was totally trumped up and in another country they might have cleared themselves in a simple hearing, but in Perón's Argentina only the fact that United Artists pledged all its resources as bond saved them from being taken straight to jail and held there for trial, which could take place at the convenience of the court, as soon as tomorrow or as long away as a year.

Hearing this, Ava was immediately sympathetic and characteristically began mothering the two unhappy men with her famed martinis. They then checked the room for microphones, turned up the radio and explained another thing—there had been terrific pressure before Ava arrived for her to visit the shrine erected to the memory of Eva Perón. "The boss," they whispered, "is a great movie fan." Ava was one of his favorite stars; moreover, the fact that she and his adored Eva shared the same name would give, he felt, a sentimental reason for her visit. If this were done, the implication was that Ava would then be invited to dine with Perón himself.

Shocked by the suggestion, Ava answered in a whisper that she couldn't, that it would bring terrible criticism of her at home. "What's more," she insisted, "I don't approve of Perón. I don't like dictators. I just won't do it."

The men explained that they realized this and certainly weren't suggesting she accept the proposal. They merely wanted to warn her that it might come from other sources, and it was best to be prepared. Nodding understanding we turned down the radio and Ava went back to her martinis, saying quite correctly, "Boys, we need another drink."

Another memory concerns Ava's prophetic "Let's tell them to slow down the plane." We were making a short jump, and for good reasons I cannot mention the cities or the airline. It was an early-morning flight and Ava hadn't time to do more than pull herself together and dash to the airport hidden behind dark

glasses. The trip wouldn't allow her enough time to get dressed and made up unless she started promptly. She went at the job with all vigor but at about the halfway mark she turned to me pleadingly. "David, I just can't make it. I don't know what to do. Ask them if they can't circle the field a bit, please."

"Sure, why not?" I answered. "I can't get killed for asking." I made my way into the cockpit and asked to speak to the captain. I told him exactly what Ava had said. The captain, a big, handsome Texan, looked thoughtful for a second, then spoke slowly. "You tell that sweet little girl back there to take all the time she wants. When she's ready all she has to do is to let me know. You just tell her to come right up here and tell me—alone."

I brought the message back to Ava, who relaxed at once and sailed through the rest of the make-up. The minute she finished she got up and went straight to the cockpit and I didn't see her again until the plane landed. Coming out she was as happy as a child. "They let me see the landing. I've done it lots of times with others but never with a regular plane. It was wonderful. And do you know we've been circling for over a half hour? That Texan's some fellow."

All along the route I had been in touch with Rio and the United Artists publicity man, Gilberto Souto. He had cabled early that reservations had been made for Ava at a hotel I had never heard of. Although I could assume it was one of the best, I knew, from having been there, that Ava would prefer the Copacabana with its bright, modern suites and its location right in the middle of everything. The Copa boasted one of Rio's best night clubs, which she would enjoy.

I cabled that the selection was unacceptable\* and received word back that the reservations were fast and the New York office had stated they couldn't be changed. Ava accepted my word that the Copacabana was better but that because of the political

troubles in Brazil, it would be wiser to accept the judgment of the people in Rio. I cabled agreement to United Artists' choice although still expressing doubts.

There wasn't too much time to worry about next week's stand when the present was so hectic. At Montevideo, Antonio, the Spanish dancer, was in Ava's suite when we heard that she was expected at the reception. Without exchanging words Ava and I dashed to the bar and grabbed stiff, straight shots of whatever was handy. Antonio looked shocked. "Ava, you shouldn't—not before the party."

"You come with us, boy," I said churlishly, "and see for yourself."

Antonio, at first, was close behind Ava and me but as the crowd swarmed all over her he soon was left far behind, pinned against a wall and unable to move. That was the last we saw of him until a half hour later when Ava returned to the suite for a breather. Coming up in the elevator we had seen a fist fight between two men who evidently hadn't been able to get into the ballroom. The police, who were everywhere, quickly subdued the men.

We found Antonio in the room, nervous and bedraggled, a glass, filled to the brim, clutched in his nervous hands. All he could manage was: "I see what you mean."

Rules have ways of making themselves and because the flights between cities composed Ava's only refuge from the crowds, the incessant photography and the persistent reporters, we rejected dozens of requests for interviews.

In the air Ava preferred to slip on a smock, curl up in the seat and sleep throughout most of the trip, leaving word to be awakened at least three-quarters of an hour before landing in order to have enough time to prepare for her arrival.

During these periods I began to learn to have vast respect for the quality about Ava that I had perceived the moment she stepped off the plane at Rome—her consummate showmanship. For someone who professed to dislike the world of the movies

and the artifices of Hollywood, she possessed a skill in the art of presenting herself to the public equaled by few of her celluloid sisters. It was not an accident that Ava could arrive somewhere after a long, arduous trip looking radiant and stunningly groomed.

Ava's preparations were as deliberate and painstaking as though she were preparing to step before the camera. And seeing them executed aboard an airplane would, I know, fascinate an expert in "time and motion."

Whenever and wherever Ava traveled her make-up case was close at hand, a two- or three-tiered affair containing a huge assortment of cosmetics, pins, clips, odds and ends of hair pieces and the porcelain caps she never uses.

Although Ava used very little make-up she applied it with skill and care, a time-consuming task under normal conditions —a hundred times more difficult in the air because of the confined space and poor lighting. But having traveled so widely, Ava had become an expert and could sneak in an eye line between "turbulence" as deftly as before her make-up mirror at home. Combing and arranging her hair were timed to the second and, at the last moment, Ava floated into the ladies' lavatory to change into whatever costume had been chosen for the arrival. When she stepped out of the powder room and surveyed herself in the large hand mirror that somehow found a place in the make-up box, a status expert would have no trouble in identifying her as a movie star.

In the case of the trip between Montevideo and Rio, the plane routine was altered—the rule against interviews broken.

The Brazilian national radio had sent a commentator to Montevideo to accompany her on the trip. So had one of Brazil's most important magazines. Beyond the rudeness involved in rejecting such extensive plans, there were good reasons for granting the requests. Brazil was and still is one of the big motion picture markets and Ava, from the beginning of her career, had been a favorite there. Too, of all the South American cities, she was

looking forward most to Rio. She was eager to get there, excited at the prospect of seeing it.

The interviews posed no particular problems and were disposed of midway in the flight, allowing Ava ample time for her quick-change act. Long before the plane began to lose altitude she was ready and dressed. As the plane flew lower neither of us saw the beautiful harbor and Sugar Loaf Mountain in front of our eyes. We were peering down at the airport, estimating the size of the crowd. The airport swarmed with tiny figures and Ava moaned, "Oh! Lord, is this going to be murder! Don't South Americans ever go home? It's almost nine o'clock."

Having expected a murderous crowd and a huge one at Rio, the imminent perturbed less than the future. The gnawing doubts about the hotel persisted. Why, I wondered, had the Brazilian office of United Artists insisted so strongly that Ava stay there? I knew she would be more contented, even if less private and comfortable, at the Copacabana, assuming, of course, that the alternative was the quiet, elegant establishment it had been cracked up to be in the exchange of wires with Rio.

Dropping lower, the swarming figures turned into a sea of excited humans. Even the field was covered with people. And when the plane touched ground and started to taxi to its berth, there was bedlam. People literally surrounded the plane, running from window to window, eager for the first glimpse of Ava. You could see instantly that the police were incapable of holding the throng behind the flimsy barricade at the edge of the field.

Within minutes the crowd turned into an unruly mob, shouting and screaming, fighting with each other to get closer to the ramp. When the cabin door was opened, the other passengers disembarked and pushed their way to customs as best they could. We waited aboard expecting that, as usual, someone from United Artists would arrive and instruct us in the procedure.

We saw no one but an officer, evidently the director of the airport, who asked Ava to leave with him. Inquiring about the

United Artists representative, I was told that the officer had never heard of him—nor of the company. Vainly I peered out over the crowd, hoping to spot Gilberto, but in the sea of faces no one was distinguishable. As the minutes ticked by and Ava failed to appear, the crowd became impatient and surly.

Insisting that Ava stay put, I walked through the passage the police had succeeded in opening—barely wide enough for one small child to walk through. On returning I said flatly, "Ava, you can't go through. We'll just have to sit here until there is some kind of order—either that or fly on with the plane."

But Ava was determined. "I'll make it. Don't worry." She told the officer not to hold her arm. "It's better if I walk alone. They'll always let a woman through."

As Ava appeared at the door there was a jubilant scream from the crowd. There was wilder frenzy than before and the tiny aisle vanished completely as the Brazilians tumbled over the policemen. Just then the plane captain called to Ava, suggesting she move fast and leave by the cockpit door where there were fewer people. As Ava turned to follow him, someone in the crowd, in perfect English, screamed, "Don't turn your ass on us, Ava."

The remark exploded like an incendiary bomb.

Ava's temper rose as she was led out the cockpit and brought to an office at the edge of the field, the size of a packing box, crowded with reporters and cameramen and blazing with TV lights. No one was in charge and there was still no United Artists representative. Ava had no idea what she was expected to do and because I stood in the way of a TV camera, an operator blandly pulled down his lights and burned the back of my neck.

Ava was being pinched and mauled. The heel of her shoe became loose and was about to come off. Soon she was on the verge of hysterics. Finding a place in the corner of the small room, she finally turned her back on the crowd and the whole sorry, undisciplined spectacle. My pleas to get her out finally fell on sympathetic ears and a car was produced, an old

broken-down machine, probably a Rio taxi. Ava fought her way into it and the car started off but seemingly in no particular direction. Whereupon Ava grabbed her shoe and hit the driver over the head with it. This was the end of the heel.

Ava, carrying a shoe in hand, bedraggled and weary, was the photograph the newsmen made as she hopped into the front entrance of the hotel. And the hotel was all that my doubts had warned—old and shabby, filled with overstuffed furniture, stained, faded and worn from years of careless use. Ava's suite was small and ugly.

Finally, the door was locked and we were alone. There were no photographers and Gilberto had finally arrived. Beyond saying that the airport authorities would not permit it, he had no explanation for not coming aboard the plane. We ordered drinks, relaxed as much as possible under the horrible circumstances and decided to move immediately to the Copacabana. Gilberto put in a call and fortunately there were accommodations available.

This had barely been accomplished when the hotel manager arrived, carrying the guest book which he invited Ava to sign. She declined politely, saying that her party was moving to the *Copa*. This information came as a blow to the manager who became furious, saying that she couldn't leave, that the reputation of the hotel was at stake, that he would be ruined. Ava apologized quietly, but far from pacifying him, her attitude made the manager more upset.

Finally the nasty truth behind United Artists' persistence in using the hotel came out. The hotel, in exchange for the distinction of housing Ava during her Rio visit, had agreed to pay all the costs of the two receptions.

This was the straw that broke Ava's back and she furiously threw her martini glass on the floor, stomped off to the bedroom shouting, "I can pay my own bills. And if United Artists can't pay theirs, it's too damned bad."

We assembled the luggage, found a car and set out for the

Copacabana. En route Ava told me that whatever else took place she wanted nothing more to do with Gilberto or with the Rio manager of United Artists. "Just keep them away from me," she warned.

The Copacabana was bright, clean and cheerful. Ava had a lovely suite overlooking the bay. Instead of the usual single room I was lodged in a suite too, although smaller and on the other side.

Quickly, Ava's mood changed and as soon as we were alone she decided we should go down to the night club, eat supper and see the late show. Within an hour or so, the horrors of the early part of the evening had been put behind us. We stayed until the club closed, and, with Ava in good spirits again, we went back to our rooms for some well-earned sleep.

Mine lasted only a few hours, as very early in the morning Gilberto appeared at my door carrying the Rio papers. Whole front pages told a fantastic story of how the hotel had ejected Ava because she had arrived drunk, disorderly and barefoot. The rumpled bed had been photographed and part of it damaged to appear that she had broken it. The bed and the broken martini glass had been photographed and decked out the headline story. The glass, it was said, had been thrown at me.

It was shocking. The melee at the airport was glossed over. Oddly, the only thing Ava actually did—swatting the driver with her shoe—wasn't mentioned.

I told Gilberto to cancel everything from the news reception that afternoon right down the line, to do nothing until Ava awoke and could analyze the mess for herself. There wasn't the slightest doubt in my mind that she would cancel, leaving United Artists minus an attraction for its New York premiere of *Contessa*.

I put in a call for Max Youngstein in New York, United Artists' vice-president in charge of advertising and publicity, the man responsible for the tour. He wasn't in, and the years have dimmed the name of the man who answered.

"Congratulations!" he screamed. "It's great. Just great."

"Are you out of your head?" I demanded angrily. "This is a madhouse here. I don't know what to do. I'm sure Ava is going to cancel, and I think damned well she should."

"Stop it! You're breaking my heart. How did you get her to take off the shoes? The whole thing is terrific. Just keep it going and get Ava to New York."

Finally, I was able to get Arnold Picker on the line. He was considerably less sanguine about the affair than the other man, not for one instant because he was concerned for Ava's name and reputation but rather because of what the mess might mean to United Artists' position in Brazil. And of course I could not argue, since Ava had insisted on Rio against his judgment. The Vargas suicide had created vast unrest and Picker had gone on record as being opposed to Ava's visit to Brazil.

His cold and businesslike suggestion was that Ava make up her own mind what to do.

It was late in the afternoon when Ava awoke and read the papers, calmly, artfully picking out the juicier passages and having them translated. She nodded her head sadly. "They never miss a dig, do they?"

She put the papers aside, leaped out of bed, started for the bathroom. "Get the press here right away. I'll be ready for them in an hour."

Sixty minutes later to the dot, beautiful, serene, poised, outwardly calm, seemingly deadly sure of herself, she walked into the hastily improvised press conference. The reporters and photographers were thunderstruck. So much so that they applauded. Even the cameramen stopped clicking long enough to join in the salute.

Looking at them and smiling, Ava, who couldn't make a speech if you dangled a million dollars in front of her nose, took advantage of the quiet that followed the applause and said loudly, for all to hear, "Thank you, gentlemen, for allowing me to meet you today as I wanted to last night."

She found a seat, collected the reporters around her and gave her account of the evening before.

To the credit of the Brazilian newspapers they printed the story as she explained it, decking out the front pages the following day with lovely pictures of her taken at the reception. Some even used the editorial page to apologize for the incident. Nothing of the kind, however, appeared outside Brazil.

The story has become fact and you can read it still—all over the world.

The next morning we decided to fly out of Rio; no one's interests would be served by staying there. I began to make arrangements and the first problem was the requirement of the Venezuelan consul that Ava appear personally at his office to obtain her visa. It took considerable persuasion to force him to change his mind but late in the afternoon the visa was granted.

Ava stayed in the hotel all day and evening, deciding late at night to go out at least to see some of Rio in the car. This was the first time that Ava had expressed any interest in seeing the cities we visited and despite the improbable hour I was happy to go along with her.

We drove for hours, until long after the sun had come up, stopping now and then in little hideaways for a drink and arriving at the market in time to watch it open. Ava gaily leaped out of the car and bought an armful of fruit which she proceeded to consume.

"Why can't we rent a boat and spend all day tomorrow on the sea?" Ava asked as we drove along the Copacabana, looking out across the white sand to the waves. "You can," I laughed, "but without me. I get seasick."

She lapsed into silence. "It would be a wonderful idea—one whole day, on the sea. No telephones, no press, no interviews—just some peace and quiet. Why can't we do it?"

"We can't do it, for the good reason that they'd follow you out to the sea in boats—photographers, newspapermen, every-

one. What's more, we're leaving for Caracas tonight. That's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

Ava asked the driver to stop the car along the shore. It had barely braked to a halt before she jumped out, took off her shoes and raced across the sand to the water. She stood at the edge, remained there for a few seconds, turned and walked slowly to the car.

"Driver," she said. "The hotel, please."

Back at the hotel, Ava decided to stop off at my floor. It was about eight o'clock in the morning. As we entered, the phone rang. "What's that?" she said instantly. "Some newspaperman, I suppose—spying." She looked at me suspiciously.

Before it had rung the second time, Ava had picked up the receiver and answered it with a hello spoken in a deep voice as though to imitate a man. Whoever was on the other end was evidently confused by the impersonation and lapsed into excited Portuguese. Without trying to press the farce further, she hung up.

"It doesn't matter. What the hell, I'll be dead in a year. You'll be, too."

She got up and left. I closed the door behind her, having said a good night she didn't answer.

Attempts to keep the departure for Caracas a secret were hardly successful. Ava was led through basement corridors through the kitchen to a waiting car. Photographers, carefully placed at strategic points, photographed every move of the flight. The manager and other hotel officials leaped from behind posts to have themselves snapped with Ava. It was a cheap and tawdry exploitation of a personality.

At the airport I was not allowed to accompany Ava aboard the plane and only managed to get her aboard before the flight was called by badgering the officials constantly, almost hysterically. When finally I joined her I found Ava sobbing uncontrollably, being calmed by a sympathetic stewardess. With sedatives she

went to sleep, and we reached Caracas the next morning. Ava's arrival there, of course, was known, but there were only a handful of newspapermen and Ava took them in stride, sitting down on a bench in the inspection hall and chatting away in her most charming manner. After our passports were processed, the officer in charge asked me discreetly if I would ask Ava to hold her press conference somewhere else because he needed the space.

Hearing this, Ava laughed. "Hallelujah!" By now the newspapermen were her chums and they took her to the car as I stayed behind for the baggage inspection.

How friends in the States found me, I'll never know, but there were two telegrams waiting at the hotel when we arrived. They were from friends, urging me to leave Ava, saying that I certainly didn't have to endure having glasses tossed in my face! A long-distance telephone from another friend said the same thing.

I showed them to Ava and told her about the call.

"Twenty years from now, David, they'll still say it. You'll be the man Ava Gardner threw a glass at. And no one has gotten in touch with me—not Beatrice, Frank, my agent—no one—not one damned soul. And you know why? Because they believe it."

The words struck like a thunderbolt. I hadn't time to think about it. But it was true—not a soul had given a damn. Not one expression of sympathy had reached Ava although the story was now three days old.

I dashed off a telegram to United Artists in New York requesting that somebody there wire Ava some message of understanding. That night it arrived. The cable, a publicity department concoction, had been signed by Arthur Krim, president of the company. Without thinking and from habit, I had torn it open.

With the help of an American assistant manager I managed to get the wire sealed in another envelope and handed it to Ava personally—unopened. She read it, smiled at its contents and tucked it away. She never showed it to me, never mentioned it. And I wondered then if she knew I had instigated it.

There were many aftermaths to the Rio debacle; some shocking, others amusing. One came to my attention months later—that Arnold Picker, consulted about my opposition to the hotel accommodations before we reached Rio, had backed up the stand, saying it was no place for Ava to be staying, that she should go to the Copacabana. But Picker was outvoted. "Maybe there'll be a blowup," someone in the publicity department muttered with hope in every prophetic word.

## 6.

Both of us were terribly tired as the plane touched down at Idlewild after an uneventful flight from Caracas. As soon as we alighted I caught sight of the United Artists publicity department, out in full, smug and serene, plainly regarding Ava's success in putting *The Barefoot Contessa* on page one as their personal triumph. I felt anything but heroic.

Still, there was a job to be done and the best course lay in sticking with it. I greeted them all cordially and introduced Ava. Naturally the press had been alerted and Ava held them spell-bound in the airport conference room as she related detail by detail the true story of Rio, calling on me now and then for confirmation of particular facts. The reporters scribbled away with such intensity that you might have imagined they were covering a conference of world leaders.

Neither Ava nor I took them seriously and when we packed ourselves into the car surrounded by an assortment of the publicists she remarked cynically but correctly, "They won't use a line." They didn't. The papers simply reported her arrival with pictures and captions saying she had returned to the States after an unfortunate episode in Brazil.

She had been booked into the Drake Hotel. We all piled into her suite—the press agents, Ava and I—and had a few drinks. Eventually I broke things up and left for my apartment on 51st Street.

Walking down the hall I saw a familiar face—none other than our old chum from Havana and Miami. It was Bill, heading straight for Ava's room. I greeted him warmly, grateful, I suppose, that there was someone around to keep her interested. It didn't occur to me to wonder why he was there—any more than it did to question his presence before we started our South American adventure.

At home I promptly collapsed and hoped for a good night's sleep before the next morning's conference with United Artists. I was absolutely certain that they had arranged a program far more extensive than Ava would be willing to undertake and I didn't look forward to the task of arguing them into whittling it down.

My suspicions were all too true, and over their protests I vetoed all but the most important requests—a *McCall's* photo of Ava and Mankiewicz by Richard Avedon, sessions with Phillip Halsman and some of the New York dailies. The United Artists crowd accused me of being more difficult than Ava, but having heard the criticism before, I found it hardly worth bothering about.

Once the program had been agreed upon, the United Artists boys figured they could go to work, but they had based this calculation on their own ideas of what a star should do—not upon what a star, especially Ava, actually does.

Ava up and disappeared.

I called her at two that afternoon. There was no answer. Barely surprised, I tried again at four but when there was still no response at six I became disturbed and asked the hotel manager to check her room. He reported back that she was indeed in the hotel but sleeping. The messages from me and from dozens of other people were still lying unopened under her door.

An even more urgent reason for getting in touch with her was that Mankiewicz needed Ava to dub two lines of dialogue. He seemed to have forgotten that Ava was no longer under his control and that dubbing lines meant, in simplest fact, that she would be doing him a favor. He put the heat on me to produce her. Knowing my ward well I could do nothing more than shrug my shoulders and tell him that we would have to wait until we heard from her. Ava had not been unmindful of Mankiewicz's silence since the start of the tour, that it was his picture that she was publicizing, that he had never made a gesture to acknowledge her efforts.

Ava's silence continued for two and a half days. I called repeatedly and always received the same answer: "Miss Gardner is not to be disturbed." To make sure I wouldn't miss her call if it ever came through, I installed someone in my apartment to answer and checked in constantly there and at the Figaro office.

When it did happen I answered a sleepy voice saying, "Hello, honey, where have you been?"

It was too silly to answer, so I said instead, "I'll be at the hotel in five minutes." Barely listening to Ava's "Okay, honey," I grabbed the copy of the publicity program and headed for the Drake.

There I found Ava lodged behind a table groaning with food, wrapped in a blue dressing gown I had seen so often on the trip that I had teased her into promising never to wear it again. "Honey, I'm sorry to be in this old thing," she apologized, "but there's nothing else to wear. I'll give it away tomorrow, I swear."

To have asked her what she had been up to for more than forty-eight hours would have been useless and tactless so I promptly plunged into the program. It was slow and easy—the way Ava liked things—appointments after lunch and in the late afternoon. She approved it without question.

Then some idea of what she had been doing came out. She

had been on the telephone—that was evident. She told me Beatrice was coming on from Hollywood for the premiere, that her family from North Carolina would be there too. Rags, her dog, a corgi given her by Frank Sinatra, was on his way by air. She told me she was going out to dinner that night and I left to check in at United Artists and start working on the publicity agenda and the dubbing date.

Outside the Drake I met a driver from a limousine service that served most of the motion picture companies, who knew I was with Ava. He greeted me cordially and, saying it as though he should have, he remarked, "Everything's all right, Mr. Hanna. I got him to the airport all right, in plenty of time."

I looked surprised and asked, "Whom did you get to the airport all right?"

"Mr. Dominguin, of course, the bullfighter."

Later Ava explained the drama of those two mysterious days. She had been in touch with Luis Miguel by telephone from South America and they had arranged a rendezvous in New York. There he had asked her for the last time to marry him and she had refused. He had gone away out of her life quietly and without fanfare, just as he had come into it—one of the few gentlemen Ava has known in the later years of her life.

The interviews bounced along, as did the photographic sessions, so the next days were busy. Beatrice arrived from Hollywood full of tall tales and news. Rags turned out to be a charmer although not too happy at city life and at being compelled to walk on a leash the two times daily that he was put into the custody of a bellhop. Ava, signing a room-service check one day, discovered his hamburger cost three dollars and fifty cents and let out a yell. Although United Artists was paying her expenses she considered the charge outrageous and sent out for Rags' dinner thereafter.

About five days before the premiere I came down with a terrible attack of dysentery—something that simply didn't make

sense in view of the way I traveled, drinking water from any old tap and eating all the things tourist guides said to avoid. Medicine didn't help me and I became sicker by the day, trying to do a difficult and demanding job in fits and spasms.

Once I simply had to quit and go home, leaving Ava's suite just as a battery of Negro photographers and journalists arrived. With them were some other men carrying scenery with a Christmas background. Nothing of the sort was on my schedule so I asked Ava about it.

She replied, "Don't worry about it. You go home if you don't feel well. This is for Sammy Davis, Jr.—a shot of him and me for the Christmas cover of *Ebony*."

I could only have deep admiration for the pluck of a girl from the South to stand still for something like that and I wondered if Sammy Davis and *Ebony* really realized what guts it took. I never gave the matter a second thought even when a few days later I leafed through the proofs and helped Ava select the one she thought best. One of the photographers dropped by and I gave him the approved copies.

I do not know that *Ebony* used the cover. I think not. But from Ava's generous gesture came one of the most shocking stories about her in a career that can claim a sizable share of brickbats. It was the famed story in *Confidential* intimating that Ava and Sammy were more than ordinary friends. The story would never have been possible were it not for the pictures showing Ava and Sammy shaking hands, talking animatedly and generally displaying themselves as warm friends.

I could tell from the dress Ava was wearing and from the background that these were the pictures originally scheduled for *Ebony* but which had instead been channeled to *Confidential* in as flagrant an attempt at victimizing a public personage as that magazine had ever attempted.

But Ava never talked up about it, dismissing the episode by saying that to sue them would only mean more bad publicity.

Metro reported that the reaction in the mail was appalling and Ava herself was, I know, deeply mortified, especially when mail poured in from people in the South. "Even my own family criticized me," she sighed sadly, "and there just wasn't any use in telling them how it happened. They wouldn't understand. Hell, they wouldn't even believe it. I was just a damned fool to pose for the pictures. No wonder people say I'm bitter. I damned well should be."

Ava was anything but bitter the night of the premiere of *The Barefoot Contessa*. She spent the day frantically trying on the red gown that had been flown from Rome—a wild red number that would stop the presses. It needed adjustments and for a time I thought she would have to settle for something else.

Although walking in it was difficult, Ava managed the magnificent Gardner appearance I had come to take for granted. As I escorted her into the Capitol Theatre the cheers from the crowd assaulted Broadway with an enthusiasm I had never heard before. Whatever their thoughts of her private life, the fans certainly were fascinated with Ava, swarming all over her, begging autographs, some of them unable to speak in her presence, still others just looking at her with half-dazed expressions.

When the house lights darkened and *The Barefoot Contessa* began, it was the first time Ava had seen more than a few rushes. I had watched a running of the rough cut in Rome, and beyond imploring Mankiewicz to make one cut in an intolerably long scene, had kept my peace about the picture as a press agent is expected to and should do. I knew the first half would play brilliantly and that the second, when the story became serious, would provoke the audience into questioning: "What the hell is going on?"

As the second half began you could feel the chill in the theatre. Some people began to fidget and one or two brave souls walked out. Ava nudged me. "That's what we should do, get the hell out of here. I'm awful."

I pressed her hand and whispered, "We can't. We'll go after Eddie O'Brien's telephone scene. That'll get a hand and we can sneak out without so much attention."

Ava waited a little longer than that—until her own death scene. We marched down the aisle and the management, as pre-arranged, met us at a side door where the car was waiting.

I was ill again and Ava suggested we stop by my house for a breather before going on to the party being given by Mrs. Mankiewicz at the St. Regis. While I poured more medicine into me, she played a Mabel Mercer record that happened to be on the record player.

"How I love her," mused Ava. "I used to hear her every night when I was first married to Frank. He said that more than anyone she taught him how to handle a lyric."

The papers were on the streets as we left the building—*The Times* and the *Herald-Tribune*. We bought a couple of copies, piled into the Cadillac, turned on the lights and started to read. They were disappointing although the *Tribune* was far better than *The Times*. In both, however, Ava came off glowingly.

"Well, at least they mentioned me before Bogart. That's something," she commented, referring to the fact that Bogart had put up a constant battle against any official mention of the picture that did not carry his name first. One advertisement had to be completely done over because United Artists had forgotten to include a picture of him as required in his contract.

That was Ava's only comment about the premiere. Her indifference was almost eerie. I felt that *Contessa* meant nothing to her, almost that she had not been a part of it. We had simply gone to a show—that and nothing more.

Ava didn't stay long at the party. We headed for a night club where she was supposed to meet Lena Horne, but when Lena wasn't there we went back to the Drake. I dropped Ava there and walked home.

In my lifetime I had taken part in many theatrical events,

sometimes as a spectator, often as an actual participant. Whatever they were, successes, failures, also-rans, they meant something. They were real and tangible. They had some vitality about them—something perhaps summed up in that intangible but wonderful word, show business. The very emptiness of the evening bothered me. It didn't seem right not to have a reaction. I should have either loved the picture, loathed Ava for being so indifferent, been annoyed at the reviews. Whatever, I should have had some reaction. Instead I felt blah.

In any case I knew it would soon be over. Mankiewicz was due to leave for the Coast and his assignment as writer and director of *Guys and Dolls*. After tomorrow and Ava's appearance at the Capitol Theatre to autograph pictures for the fans, she too would be gone. I could expect a few more weeks' work on *Contessa* and that would be the end.

Ava was bright and ready at noon the next day when I collected her and as we drove to the theatre we could see long lines stretching around the corner. She slipped into a side door where the management was waiting to take her to a place arranged for her in the lobby. It was all terribly efficient and smooth, so much so that Ava winked at me. "Hell, it was much more fun in South America."

Once the crowd did get slightly out of hand and the management insisted Ava retire to an office until more police were summoned. There she told the theatre people off gaily. "This is kid stuff. I'm not afraid of a few thousand fans—they're just babies. What are you worried about?"

Nevertheless the Capitol people imposed their will and Ava stayed put until order was restored.

The following day, with Beatrice and Rags, she flew to Hollywood and once again I thought I had seen her for the last time.

## 7.

The uneasiness that affected United Artists before the Capitol Theatre premiere of *The Barefoot Contessa* was discernible before the second important opening of the picture at the Fine Arts Theatre in Los Angeles.

And with reason. *Contessa* had shown its true colors. The reviews were "mixed" in New York and the fact that the influential *New York Times* appraisal by Bosley Crowther had been so unenthusiastic and failed to summon the greenbacks of Mankiewicz audiences, the fans of *All About Eve* and *A Letter to Three Wives*, took its toll at the huge Broadway house. Business, after the first few days, was off and worsened as the picture was forced into a run far beyond its capacity. Once again United Artists decided to lean on Ava and this time framed an around-the-world trip after the Los Angeles opening that would include premieres and gala performances at Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, Rome, Stockholm, and Berlin.

Although efforts were underway at a reconciliation between Ava and Metro and, in fact, were close to being resolved, she was still under suspension and therefore available. It was worth the effort to send me to Hollywood to find her again, even if the results were no more substantial than persuading her to attend the Hollywood premiere.

She had delivered a marvelous show at the Capitol. The stunning evening gown she wore to the performance was photographed widely and spun the world, carrying with it the important credit title. By now Ava was identified as the Barefoot Contessa, thanks in a large part to the drama at Rio. Putting it mildly, she was worth her weight in gold to an unsubstantial

picture that needed every ounce of publicity machination to keep it going. Having been produced on a comparatively low budget for its time and quality, it was now established for what it was—a hit-and-run show, a movie that carried itself briefly for a few days because of Gardner. It would never reach right down into the hearts, or the pocketbooks, of the general public. The idea behind Ava's appearance in Hollywood was to wrap up the film as an important item on the profitable Fox West Coast Chain. *Contessa* was being sold at excessive terms and as long as the publicity deception was maintained, would survive and at least recoup its cost.

I was welcomed back at the Sunset Towers and placed the first telephone call to Beatrice and shortly thereafter was talking to Ava at Palm Springs. "Get yourself down here," she ordered. "There's a plane in the morning. My house is near the airport. I'll meet you."

At Palm Springs Ava looked better than I had ever seen her before—bronzed by the sun but not too much so, bright-eyed, in fine spirits and brimming with good health. Under these conditions it was not difficult to broach the United Artists program. She had no reservations about attending the premiere, provided United Artists paid for her dress.

"You know what that New York dress did," she said, revealing how carefully she checks on all her publicity. "It made all the papers everywhere—and I paid for it myself. Not this time, brother!"

I assured her United Artists would buy her a gown and we agreed that the around-the-world trip could be decided upon in collaboration with Metro. Only days were involved in the signing of a revised contract and already her next picture, *Bowhani Junction*, had been selected. Ava's availability, then, for the tour depended on its starting date.

At the moment it was all way up in the air because the Indian government had refused Metro permission to shoot there because the story showed the country in an unfavorable light.

There were plans afoot to film it in Pakistan where, eventually, it was done.

Mankiewicz, back in Hollywood writing *Guys and Dolls* for Samuel Goldwyn, was perturbed by the idea of another international tour by Ava, "Why don't you get rid of that dame?" he demanded. Without acknowledging the truth—that *Contessa* needed every ounce of support she could give it—I tried to explain that United Artists was running the show, that his defection from Figaro to accept *Guys and Dolls* had amounted to abrogating the control. "All right," he agreed, "but keep her out of London. I don't want her there, making a scene and confusing the critics. That's one place I expect good reviews."

Mankiewicz's preoccupation with good reviews induced by Crowthers' snub forced me into an extraordinary line of action when, in the haste to get to Palm Springs and Ava, I was forced to track down Edwin Schallert, the drama and film editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, who was somewhere on vacation between New York and Los Angeles. He had seen *Contessa* in New York, liked it and we were fairly sure of a good review from him.

I found Schallert in New Orleans but he politely declined the suggestion that he review *Contessa*, saying that Philip K. Scheuer, then his assistant and now film editor of the *Times*, would undoubtedly do it justice. To interfere while Scheuer was in charge would be tactless—as if I didn't know. Happily, Scheuer did it justice, but I couldn't report it as a *fait accompli* at the time. Leaving a turbulent Mankiewicz, I flew to Palm Springs and Ava, knowing the boss took a dim view of the whole affair.

Ava's house was simple and lovely, right at the edge of the airport, removed from the hurly-burly of mid-town Palm Springs. One look at her and I knew she had been spending her time well, dipping in the pool, sitting in the sun—and cooking, an art she told me repeatedly she adored but which I had never actually seen in action.

And quite a performance it was! Using the stove, all its parts

from broiler, burner to oven, a charcoal broiler in the patio and odds and ends of other equipment, she cooked a steady stream of Southern, Chinese, Italian and California foods.

"Ava, you're the best damned cook in the world," I exclaimed over and over as the generous meals blended straight into one another.

Somehow, between gorging, we settled down to business. Ava explained that after the New York opening of *Contessa* she had returned to Hollywood, "loathed it as always," and decided to hibernate in Palm Springs while Metro and her agents bickered back and forth. "It's been wonderful," she explained happily. "I'm on a real health kick. Not a drink in weeks— Oh, now and then just for kicks but nothing much."

As in Havana the entire first day of my visit had gone by without paying attention or noticing particularly the presence of the stocky young man with the crew cut who wandered vaguely around the house, dipping into the pool occasionally, helping out now and then but saying very little as he carried the coke for the barbecue and drove into town on errands.

It was Bill again and, as in Havana, Ava's supreme indifference to him rubbed off on me.

But this time, however, I was curious and when after dinner he left, making little formality of moving along, I finally asked Ava, "Who the hell is that guy?"

"Him? Bill?" She looked at me in astonishment as though I had suddenly forgotten her name. "Do you mean to say you don't know?"

I shook my head.

"Why, he's the spy."

"Spy?" I laughed. "What do you mean? What kind of a spy?"

Ava was downright apologetic. "I'm sorry, hohey, I should have told you. He's the spy. You-know-whose spy."

"You're kidding," I said with shocked disbelief.

"I'm not kidding," continued Ava. "He's not the first. There's always a spy watching me. He's just the newest—and the nicest

—so I invited him in. Why should he do his spying on the outside?"

Naturally, I had known something of Ava's relationship with the person in question, that he had known her almost from the day she arrived in Hollywood and always seemed to be with her between husbands. She had mentioned that he had always wanted to marry her, that he had thrown everything at her feet —money, jewels, the prospect of a huge premarital settlement, anything that his huge financial empire could produce.

As a matter of fact I had worked with Ava on a couple of stories about her in which the relationship had been freely discussed. One of them in *Look* had quoted Ava as saying that she continued to see him because "for one thing he'd never given up wanting to marry me, and that's very flattering for a girl. For another, he makes it easy for me when I want things easy."

"You're in Palm Springs and you want to go shopping in Mexico City. All you need is to call, and within minutes there's a chauffeur outside waiting to take you to the airport, where there's an airliner standing by to take you to Mexico City.

"And when you get there, you're met by another chauffeured limousine and driven to the best hotel in town, where there's a suite waiting for you. If you want to be quiet and left alone, he arranges it. He's just the right ticket for a girl like me, from the Deep South and lazy."

Ava told me how it was possible for her to elude the press when she decided not to press her divorce action against Frank Sinatra and wanted to leave quietly. A Constellation was simply brought to Nevada, and she was flown to Miami where she changed to a scheduled airliner and flew to Havana. There Bill was assigned to "spy on her."

"I think that guy had more to do with breaking me up with Luis Miguel than anybody," she said sadly. "But I could never have married him. Too much family. But he was a good friend. One of the best I ever had. Do you know when I was sick in the hospital in Madrid with kidney trouble and the columnists

were taking pot shots at me and I didn't receive a telegram from anybody but Bob Mitchum—do you know what Luis Miguel did? He took a room in the hospital and stayed there every minute of the day—never went out—ate all his meals with me. He did everything."

I brought the conversation back to Bill. "But why does he do this kind of work?" I asked.

"Why?" Ava looked at me as though she thought I was a perfect idiot. "Because it's his job. And that's the way those stooges always work. They do what they're told—and I promise you they're not getting rich. This one is a lawyer, married with two kids. Do you know what he's doing now? He's probably telephoning to report that you're here. And he's telling *him* everything we talked about."

She stopped. "Oh! To hell with it. Let's go out on the town. I'm going to get dressed."

Ava disappeared into her bath and I tried my best to digest the incredible revelation. No one, of course, could cover Hollywood as long as I had without becoming inured to its antics, but I was still surprised.

When Ava emerged from her room, she headed straight for the kitchen where she mixed martinis, stirring them as always, with her fingers. "It's my first night out. Let's have a ball."

The martinis downed, we headed for the garage and Beatrice's old, battered Chevy which Ava gunned as we headed for town, promising we would hear the liveliest combo this side of Birdland. "We'll just have a quick look," she promised.

The quick look naturally spread into the wee hours of the morning and included a tour around the outside of the Palm Springs house in which she had lived with Frank Sinatra. "I was happier there than any place I've ever been," she said somewhat sadly as she peered over the fence at the piano-shaped swimming pool. "It's the only home I ever had."

The trip back to the house was quiet but, once inside, Ava regained her gaiety and announced that she was hungry. But

after shopping through the icebox and the shelves stocked with all sorts of delicacies and things as plain as potato chips and marshmallows, she announced, "I want hamburgers. Let's go out and get some at the all-night drive-in."

Without thinking I answered, "Why go out? Let's call the spy and tell him to bring some over."

She snapped her fingers. "Of course." She turned on her heels, went to the telephone, dialed and before I could utter a protest she had Bill on the phone. Tensely, she told him what she wanted.

I protested: "Ava, don't! It's too late, four o'clock in the morning. The poor guy is in bed. I shouldn't have opened my mouth."

"Don't feel sorry for him," she snapped. "He's paid to spy on me. Why shouldn't he earn his dough?"

We waited sullenly and without speaking. Ava dialed Bill's number again, inquired if he had left. Almost as she hung up, we could hear Bill's car putttering up the driveway.

In a few seconds he was at the door, his arms filled with paper bags dripping with hamburger juice. Shades of Havana!

Without saying a word, Ava opened the bags, looked inside. "Hell, they're on bread. I wanted rolls."

Bill apologized, explaining the stand had run out of rolls, that bread was the best he could do.

Ava stormed out of the kitchen. Bill found a seat in the corner of the kitchen. There wasn't anything to say as I found a hamburger and began munching it aimlessly with a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach.

Finally I spoke. "Look Bill, I'm embarrassed. It's all my fault. I started it, and I'm sorry. You're tired. Go on home. I'll tell Ava."

Bill didn't budge.

"Go on now," I pressed. "I'll take the blame. You get some sleep."

Finally, Bill was persuaded to leave. I could hear Ava whirl-

ing the water in the bath. Some ten or fifteen minutes later she appeared in the kitchen, wrapped in a robe of white toweling. "Where's Bill?" she demanded.

"I sent him home, Ava. He was beat."

"Is that so? How long ago?"

"About ten minutes."

"Good, he'll be there now." She dialed the phone. Bill was there. Over the mouthpiece, Ava hollered, "You get back right away. I need some things done around here."

I stole away to the guest room, undressed, and by the time I pulled the sheets up around me, I could hear the sound of a car racing along the gravel road. Bill, the spy-man, had come back.

The next day, the incident with Bill behind her and forgotten, Ava was back on her health kick, up at noon, early according to Gardner standards. We spent it quietly, lolling around, making a few calls to Hollywood about the trip and talking about it ourselves. Obviously Ava wanted to go and with characteristic impatience she failed to understand why Metro couldn't settle a starting date for *Bowhani Junction* immediately.

She cooked for a large part of the day, and dinner was sumptuous and rewarding although a conglomeration that Ava insists is the only way to eat: everything at once—steaks, chops, green vegetables, garlic bread, potatoes, Caesar salad and dessert. It took as long to eat as it did to prepare and by ten in the evening both of us, stuffed to the gills, were ready to call it a day, when the telephone rang.

I could near Ava say, "How did you know I'd be home tonight? Maybe I'd be out . . . I suppose you know I was out last night . . . No, don't bother. I know all about it. The spy told."

Without saying a word, she slipped a jacket over her plain cotton dress and headed for the garage. The car started and she was gone.

Not expecting to see Ava again that night, I wandered off to the guest room, piled into bed and reached for a book.

Not fifteen minutes later I heard the car return, followed within seconds by a knock at my door. Ava came in and sat down.

She slumped in the chair, spread her legs and let her hands fall between them, her hair wind-blown over her face. I waited for her to speak.

"David! Did you ever see \$250,000 in cash?"

"No," I laughed, "and I never expect to. Why?"

"I just did."

"Well, where is it?" I demanded, getting interested and hoping some lightness, however obvious, might break what seemed to be her mood.

"I saw it—just now, all wrapped up in thousand-dollar bills, in an old shoe box. He flew down with it tonight."

"Who flew down with it?" I asked.

"Who else in the world would do a thing like that? That's who telephoned. He was at the airport. I drove over to see him. He said he wanted to make a picture with me. He'd arrange it with Metro—and he could. The cash would be my bonus."

"What did you tell him?"

"Tell him!" Ava's head flashed back and her hair settled into wild disarray on top of her head. "I told him to lump it, that if he wanted to make a deal with me he'd have to talk with my agent like everybody else. That I wasn't touching that kind of money—not now—not ever."

She was silent again and her eyes swept the floor. "Nope, not that kind of money. Not if I starve."

She stood up from the chair, brushed her hair wearily back over her head and walked to the door. "Good night, honey. See you tomorrow."

## 8.

No single area of the world has produced as many theatrical fortunes as the studios of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, standing at the edge of Culver City, one of the many suburbs of labyrinthine Los Angeles. Composed of a loose collection of buildings and sound stages, they are slung together in the crazy-quilt architectural pattern typical of the city. Like Los Angeles and Topsy, Metro just "grewed"—all over and in every direction.

Metro's front and back lots are separated by the Pacific Electric Railway, connecting downtown Los Angeles with the cities of Santa Monica and Venice. Consequently, the shooting of outdoor scenes on the back lot is geared to the railway's timetable. Metro's armed police, however, can stop traffic and trains at will when the studio's huge scenery trucks move in and out of the lots.

Metro is a completely self-contained factory of entertainment, boasting its own hospital with a physician and nurses always on call, a swimming pool, Turkish baths, commissary, dozens of dressing rooms rivaling in splendor those of the Waldorf Tower—and its own little red schoolhouse.

Theoretically, an actress could come to Metro as a small child, be educated there, marry, raise a family, work at making pictures for a lifetime, all without ever leaving the premises. Even her funeral services could be held just outside the studio's side gate at a mortuary that stands in full view of MGM's executive offices, a grim reminder to the company's rich, well-fed managers that you can't take it with you. (Motion picture people are notoriously apprehensive about death and it is a known

fact that when one of the upper echelon passes on, doctors' offices in Beverly Hills are crowded with high-priced producers, directors, and writers who have just dropped in "for an extra checkup." Often Metro sought to buy up the eyesore, but the mortuary people steadfastly declined, thus earning the distinction of being among the very few who have not bowed to the company's will.)

Like the Leo the Lion of its symbol, Metro, in its lush years, reigned supreme, if not always benignly. It was, in its own vernacular, a Titan, a colossus. From the standpoints of prestige, quality, quantity, gross income, net profits, real assets—by all the yardsticks of business success—Metro consistently led the pack of the old-guard movie companies, Warners, Paramount, 20th Century-Fox and RKO-Radio. Once Metro could churn away at as many as fifty pictures a year while its parent company, Loew's Inc., gobbled up theatre interests at an even more spectacular pace—from Yonkers to Hong Kong, from White Plains to Rio. Metro, by its very nature as the Titan Colossus of the picture industry, exerted huge pressure in the civic affairs of Los Angeles. Nor did its influence stop there. It stretched across the nation to Washington where for years the antitrust cases the Justice Department sought to press against the major film companies were successfully delayed. The charges against MGM, 20th Century-Fox, Warner Brothers, RKO-Radio, Paramount, covered a wide number of offenses, from monopoly, coercion, criminal conspiracy, to the very evident accusation that their unilateral control of production, distribution and exhibition had closed the motion picture screens of the United States to any but their own pictures and those of the few favored minors, Columbia, Universal, Republic and Monogram.

Even abroad, Metro's roar was heard and heeded, as the company's representatives sat in on policy-making conferences to determine the annual quota of American films that would be granted import permits. Metro invariably received its expected lion's share.

Metro stood as living proof of the public's predilection for the stars. Other studios often suggested—and even attempted—films in which dynamic story ideas dominated the actors. But they were few and far between. From its lofty heights, Metro viewed any rebellion against its tried and true system with polite disdain, smug in the belief that it was temporary. Unwaveringly Metro clung to its stars, discovering, developing, glamourizing, pampering, and spoiling them.

Somehow, Metro stars stood apart from the herd, possessing an aura of mystery, a special glamour. There was Garbo, for instance, who never met the press; Norma Shearer, the personification of chic, sophisticated virtue; Crawford, the hoyden, who yearned to be a lady even if at a Screen Actors Guild White Ball she shocked filmland by wearing a red dress. Metro's stars lived in a world of fantasy that hypnotized a public into plunking down its quarters and half dollars, its Chinese yen, Italian lire and French francs at Loew's theatres around the world.

Although Metro nursed its stars as carefully as a mother hen, fussing over them endlessly, soothing their ruffled feelings, calming their nerves, they, no less than stenographers and office boys, were expendable in the frequent industry crises that have always been a part and parcel of movie making. As John Gilbert of another era quietly withdrew from movies when his voice failed to match his virile looks, so did another champ, Clark Gable, inauspiciously leave the lot—without even an engraved watch to mark his years of service. Norma Shearer, whose husband, Irving Thalberg, lifted MGM to its pinnacle, was forced to engage a battery of lawyers to receive her proper share of his estate when her own days as a box-office star appeared numbered, her usefulness to Metro thereby diminished. Greta Garbo simply never came back after finishing *Two-Faced Woman* and the final picture on her contract was quietly canceled. More durable, tougher than the others, Joan Crawford literally suspended herself for years rather than accept the poor pictures Metro offered her. By the time she signed at Warners for her

magnificent *Mildred Pierce*, it was as though a new face had come to Hollywood.

Completely innocent, totally unaware but for the Hollywood she had read about in fan magazines, seventeen-year-old Ava Gardner arrived on the West Coast as the ward and property of the motion picture industry's Robber Baron. But when she appeared on the scene in 1941, Leo was having his nails manicured. The antitrust division of the Justice Department had finally closed in, and "the big five," as the industry leaders were dubbed, called it a day in their long battle to perpetuate the monopoly. They entered consent decrees to all the government charges and agreed to divest themselves of their theatre holdings. They paved the way for the resurgence of the independent producer and the new, thoughtful, and mature screen entertainment we sometimes see today.

The wartime movie boom sustained Metro's position as leader. But no special perception was required to predict that Metro's much-prided quality—its elegance, chic and taste—was disappearing from its pictures. The great stars of yesterday were either gone or on their way—Garbo, Dressler, Jean Harlow, Wallace Beery, Myrna Loy, Joan Crawford, Norma Shearer. Others like Clark Gable, Robert Montgomery, Melvyn Douglas and Jimmy Stewart were in service—and glad of it.

Undismayed and as staunch as ever in its conviction that stars could head off any financial catastrophe produced by peace and the shadow of postwar television, Metro turned to a different type of personality, to youngsters of every size, shape, description, and talent. (No doubt this change of policy was inspired by a mistake the Lion never failed to regret—when it dropped its option on a chubby little singer who toddled from Culver to Universal City, signed at Universal Studios, changed her name from Edna May to Deanna Durbin and singlehandedly put a near-bankrupt company into the black.)

For seventeen years I had covered Metro as a reporter, reporting its activities and reviewing its films. I had interviewed

countless of its stars, its executives, producers and directors. I thought I knew the Metro lot as well as the city rooms of the *Hollywood Reporter* and the *Los Angeles Daily News*, the two papers on which I divided this long tenure in the film capital. But the fleeting visit I made there with Ava in 1954 showed me that I was mistaken. In all my years on papers I had seen nothing.

Bert Allenberg had reached a settlement with Metro about Ava's contract, giving her some say in respect to script, a salary readjustment and a deferment of her annual earnings to be spread over several years after the expiration of the contract. The revised contract defined more clearly her participation in the Metro pension plan. There was at least an oral agreement that Ava's pictures would be made overseas so she might benefit from laws exempting United States citizens residing abroad from paying income tax. Behind the whole revised structure was Ava's ambition to get her hands on some real money quickly in order to retire.

Until then she had been way down the ladder in Metro's economic structure, sharing none of the largess the studio heaped on favored stars and grand old executives. It was no secret that at the root of Metro's pension plan, the first and most comprehensive in the film industry, was Louis B. Mayer's "humiliation" at being named annually as the country's highest-paid executive. This perennial front-page story never failed to mention sarcastically that Mayer's pay ranged anywhere from eight to twelve times more than that of the President of the United States.

With the signing of the new contract Ava at last returned to the studio to do some preliminary work on *Bhowani Junction*. It was her first visit in years and Ava insisted on taking me along —"for moral support," she said.

Going behind Metro's scenes with Ava and hearing incidents of her girlhood on the lot brought her story into clearer focus—the story of a teen-age girl who grew up in what amounted to a

foreign land. From the beginning she tasted all the luxuries of a beautiful starlet, none of the joys of being a beautiful girl. Success was simply plopped into her lap when she joined the others who made up Metro's stable of brand-new stars—Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney, Lana Turner, Esther Williams, Elizabeth Taylor, Cyd Charisse, and Jane Powell.

On them Metro lavished all its considerable skill in fashioning new personalities. Ava was put through the mill with customary assembly-line precision. Like a new motor she was shipped from department to department while experts peered at her.

They examined her teeth, studied her figure, experimented with her hair, made sketches of her facial contours to determine if corrective make-up was necessary. They made her walk and commented on her posture. She was initiated into the secrets of MGM's make-up tricks.

This was the tooling-up process for the day when the progeny would become stars: some, like Esther Williams, overnight; others like Ava, gradually. And once stars, they were on their own. The period of training and sheltering was completed. From healthy, talented, beautiful people they had been converted into whatever image Metro had decided upon. And it was up to the individual to live with it—and with the umbilical chord of a Metro contract.

The unnaturalness of it all was too transparent. Behind Metro's locked gates, those of school age were tutored by private teachers as required by California law. The others studied their craft spasmodically. Ava, for example, took her diction lessons and absorbed a few basic principles about acting. Judy and Mickey were already overworked, rolling out musical after musical together while Mickey, for encores, tossed off two or three *Andy Hardy* pictures a year. "Mickey made a fortune for Metro," said Ava angrily, "but when he was through and needed their help, they tossed him right out on his can."

Obviously Metro, where she had been called "Miss" by men and women twice her age, loomed in Ava's mind as an oppressive boarding school. And even her new status as a contractee with an adjusted deal did not diminish her awe of her teachers, the men whose names she uttered her first night in Rome: Eddie Mannix, Harry Rapf, Bennie Thau. These, in the history of Metro's operation, were never figurehead executives but flesh-and-blood men on whose decisions rested the success or failure of a star.

Louis B. Mayer had gone and Dore Schary was the new Pooh Bah. But Mayer's spirit, that of a mighty patriarch, lingered on. Even if he had not always been loved, he was missed. He had played well his role of wise old father, showering favors when he felt they were deserved, punishing firmly when his wishes went unheeded.

"It's no great shakes now, but it was a damned sight better when the old man was around," Ava confided. "I never liked him very much but at least you knew where you stood. This joint's come down a lot in the world."

I waited while Ava took a diction lesson for the English accent she needed in *Bhowani Junction*. After giving it the minimum amount of time, Ava extracted herself. "I don't have to waste time on this junk," she remarked. "Hell, I'll pick up the accent the minute I get to London."

I could see the rightness of Ava's observations that she had never given much to her career. The truth was even stranger —she didn't have to.

"You know," she said, as we passed the make-up and hairdressing building, "I'll never forget my first weeks here. I was so frightened and shy. They sent me to the hairdressers to see what they would do with my mop. Hell, I was nobody, so they sat me down in a great big room with a bunch of actors who were working that day. I tried to focus my eyes on a magazine. Suddenly I heard a voice and felt a man behind me. 'Stop chewing that

gum, will you? Take it out of your mouth this minute.' It was Sydney Guilaroff [Metro's top hairdresser]. I never felt so ashamed in my life."

Ava, so quick to resent any slight, much less so direct a reproach, now counts Sydney Guilaroff as one of the true, good friends from her Metro days. Another is the studio's publicity director, Howard Strickling.

In the mercurial world of Hollywood publicists, where the heads chopped off in the course of a year would require Madame Lafarge to swap her knitting needles for a loom, Howard Strickling is unique. He has been Metro's publicity director for years and years, serving as confidant to Louis B. Mayer and father confessor to three generations of Metro stars. His judgment, however one might disagree with him at the time, always proved uncannily correct. More than any other publicity man he understood that the way to ride out a crisis was to keep the people involved and himself under cover. He realized that no news story dies down more quickly than a Hollywood furor. Even more, he recognized the public's willingness, even eagerness, to forgive its idols' indiscretions. Strickling, for instance, supported Ava's judgment in not retaliating against *Confidential* for the several slanderous articles it printed about her. Other advisers wanted her to sue.

Strickling telephoned and asked me to drop out to the studio for a visit. Although I had never had much professional contact with him as a newspaperman, I knew him and his neat, uncluttered two-secretaried office fairly well. He wanted to talk to me about Ava but words came with difficulty. He was, I gathered, telling me to take care of her, which was hardly necessary. I knew that already. He compared Ava to Jean Harlow, saying they possessed the same devil-may-care, flamboyant personalities that often led them to do things they regretted later. This, too, was hardly news. It was a wasted quarter of an hour and when I broke away Strickling shook my hand warmly. "Now if you need anything on your trip, just let the Metro office know.

Send me your itinerary as soon as you have it and I'll circulate it abroad."

There was no use pointing to the obvious. Metro had, once before, circulated Ava's itinerary—extensively and profitably—during her South American tour. Everywhere we went, Ava's old pictures, *Show Boat* and *Pandora*, had been hauled out of vaults and put into first-run theatres to capitalize on the visit. Posters of Ava endorsing Lux soap and plugging Metro pictures assailed her from hundreds of billboards. But Metro's South American managers, ordered to ignore her, did not even send her flowers.

United Artists bought Ava two lovely gowns, costing one thousand dollars each, for the Los Angeles and Tokyo premieres. They were shimmering bugle-bead affairs that Ava had to slither into—*sans* slip. Ava wouldn't have been caught dead in either of them at a social affair, but when she saw them her instinctive showmanship told her immediately that the newspapers and public would respond. The gowns were referred to forever after as "the dresses David bought me."

Ava had moved into Hollywood from Palm Springs, taking an apartment not far from Nichols Canyon where she had lived some years before. Nichols Canyon, dark and damp for Southern California, is a rustic wonderland but has never been fashionable with the film elite, who cluster instead in Beverly Hills and Bel Air. Ava as usual was thumbing her nose at Hollywood conventions.

As in New York, the papers were filled with items about Ava and again there was speculation as to who would escort her to the premiere of *The Barefoot Contessa*. She had spent quite a few months in Hollywood without any headlines. So from the beginning I was elected, because Ava was especially anxious not to have any trumped-up entanglements on her hands.

Despite the fact that Frank Sinatra was in town for the filming of *Guys and Dolls* there had not been the usual speculation

about the possibility of a reconciliation. That she had gone to Nevada seemed to seal the separation, although the decree had not been asked for. Ava had begun to be considered another Hollywood bachelor girl and her occasional visits with Sinatra were accepted as normal. (Hollywood dotes on separated or divorced couples who remain friends.)

In Ava's remarks about Sinatra, I began to detect a new attitude. Some of the bitterness had disappeared. Having him so close at hand evidently convinced her that she was no longer in love with him and could finally blow out the torch she had carried for over a year. Instead of calling him Sinatra, she referred to him as "Francis" or "my old man." Being in Hollywood reminded her of things about him she wanted to remember affectionately—like visiting the house at Palm Springs—and she was characteristically free and easy in her remembrances of their happier days together. She played his records constantly and proclaimed to all and sundry that he was the greatest of the great.

This was the beginning of a new stage in the relationship between Ava and Frank, the start of a mutual warm affection and admiration that certainly had not been evident in their short marriage. In truth they are much better friends now.

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that Sinatra represents to Ava the one dependable person in her life even if, in her stubborn pride, she insists on being quoted in magazines that she could turn to no one but herself for help. And I am equally sure Frank himself has deliberately imposed this feeling that Ava can depend on him. The reasons are immaterial. They may stem from his vaunted generosity or from his own particular kind of possessiveness; he has need for Ava to lean on him. To this day when he telephones, he instructs the long-distance manager to ask for Mrs. Sinatra.

Whatever his purpose, he has managed it adroitly, responding to Ava's desires when they are genuine, such as his overnight booking of a concert in Melbourne when Ava appeared

to need him in Australia. Yet, a few months earlier, when she arrived in New York escorted by Walter Chiari, Sinatra, not illogically, refused to answer her telephone calls.

If a reconciliation of their marriage had been desired it could have been achieved, had Ava been willing to live in the United States. But as she became more Europeanized she began to see flaws in Frank that hadn't existed before—at least not so conspicuously. She always deplored his brashness and his arrogance. She was never sympathetic to the Sinatra mob of hangers-on, the sycophants who surrounded him wherever he went, disporting themselves more like bodyguards than professional associates. She disliked the racy areas of his activities: Hollywood, Las Vegas, New York and Florida. And now petty details had been added to her appraisal of Sinatra—the too-sharp clothes, the small-brimmed straws, the bow ties. Even his lively hep language.

But as any young girl, Ava's eyes were starry when she married Frank Sinatra in the fall of 1951 at the Philadelphia home of the late theatrical agent, Manie Sacks. Their courtship had been stormy and highlighted by Lochinvar Sinatra's flight to Spain to recapture his Lady Fair. But the past was forgotten not only in the thrill of marrying her idol, but in the frenzy of avoiding the press coverage such a union naturally stimulated. The proposed marriage started under a cloud when, to a man, the Hollywood columnists showered Ava with brickbats by insisting she had tempted him away from his wife and family. "It wasn't true," Ava insisted. "Frank was separated from Nancy when I met him. But what's the use of explaining that over and over? No one believes me anyhow."

The wedding turned out to be a shambles, thanks to Sinatra's edict that it could not be covered. The decree challenged the photographers to a duel and by sheer force of numbers the newlyweds lost out. Their wedding night consisted of an unromantic flight from the press—the first of many that have characterized their lives, together and apart, ever since.

From the moment the knot was sealed, friends predicted a short life expectancy. Sinatra's decline was real, financially and vocally. His voice, it seemed, had faded a bit, and the Broadway-Hollywood rumor mongers had it that he would never sing again. High taxes, high living, lavish generosity and the price of a huge settlement with Nancy had left him with little in reserve.

By this time Ava's career was thriving. Her stock at Metro had begun to soar with pictures such as *The Hucksters* and *Show Boat* and, as always, she was in demand for loan-out engagements. She set less score on her own success than on the happiness of mothering Sinatra, talking him out of his moods of deep depression, bolstering his courage and reassuring him that he was the world's best singer. There wasn't a doubt in her mind that when he hit the comeback trail he would be bigger than ever. And Frank, despite outward evidence of self-pity, must have realized this too or he would never have conceived the spectacular idea of selling himself for the role of Maggio in the best-selling war novel *From Here to Eternity*, which was to be made by Columbia. He cleverly publicized his determination to win the part, and willingness to accept any salary offered, even none at all. The proposal wasn't taken seriously until Ava herself entered her own personal plea with the Columbia production head, the late Harry Cohn, literally begging him at least to test Frank. When the test was made and the singer's unsuspected acting talents revealed on the screen, Cohn shrewdly seized the chance to capitalize on such a notable casting, and at so ridiculously low a price—eight thousand dollars.

This was a turning point in Frank's career—and in his marriage. The publicity he received from the spectacular stunt created a tremendous new demand for Sinatra. In only a matter of weeks he took to the road and was once again singing to capacity audiences around the country. Las Vegas and New York became his headquarters as Ava stayed home in Hollywood, making pictures.

Stories of rifts in their marriage seeped into the press and eventually their quarrels were on public display. You can't fire two shots out of a hotel window along New York's Central Park nor cut your veins slightly in Las Vegas in feigned suicide attempts, as Frank did, and keep them quiet. Ava rushed to his side in Las Vegas but in New York she quietly told Frank to go ahead and shoot himself if he wanted to.

Nor is it in the essence of discretion to call the police at Palm Springs, as Sinatra did, when, after ordering Ava and Lana Turner out of his house, he became angry because the two women didn't pack quickly enough to suit him.

Ava was never inclined to minimize her own role in the failure of the marriage. "I was so jealous every minute he was away from me. When I couldn't get him on the telephone right away at Las Vegas or wherever he was I wanted to kill myself. It was stupid, I suppose. But I did it and that's that."

Their marriage ended officially when Ava flew to Rome. They were not divorced until July 5, 1957, when Ava obtained a Mexican decree during the filming of *The Sun Also Rises*. Sinatra has never attempted to obtain a divorce in the States.

What impelled Ava to leave Las Vegas without getting the divorce has never been made clear. At the time she told newspapers some matters of financial settlement were involved. She had asked nothing of Mickey Rooney or of Artie Shaw. To my knowledge there was never a settlement with Sinatra. As a matter of fact whenever Ava saw a picture of Nancy she remarked angrily, "Look at her. She's got a million dollars. And what do I have? Nothing."

I have always thought Ava simply didn't have the courage to face the heavy battery of press men who were waiting for her that day at Tahoe. It had never entered Ava's mind until her marriage with Sinatra to avoid or feud with the press. There was no reason for it. She was, she realized, an actress, a public figure and being photographed wherever she went, though tiresome, was part of the game. But Frank soon taught her his

own tough technique of dealing with newsmen: how to chase photographers out of night clubs, how to demand negatives and to tear up rolls of film. At the time Ava admitted to friends that the whole procedure annoyed her. But this, she realized too, was life with Frank, so she played along. It was her way of grasping onto what she has claimed has always been her overwhelming desire—a husband, a home and children.

But none of these things materialized during her marriage to Frank—at least not as Ava envisioned them. Frank's home became his luggage and the hotel suites along the route of a trouper who needed the salvos and applause of an audience. Her home became—perhaps in retaliation—the capitals of Europe where her fame and her beauty had begun to buy what she in turn needed—adulation, capriciousness and willfulness.

Finally, the inevitable happened and, as the spectators from the sidelines had predicted, the marriage became a formality.

It was an ordinary premiere, containing neither more nor less than the usual excitement. More than in New York its success depended upon Ava's appearance, because the movie crowd realized *Contessa* was far from super-Mankiewicz. Of course the stalwarts were there, the stars who turn up "for the industry," including the Queen Bee herself, Joan Crawford. Just as Ava's car drove up and to prevent a photographer's flurry to shoot them together, she disappeared into the theatre saying as she left, "It's Ava's night and doesn't she look beautiful?"

Ava's bugle beads hit the dailies next day and spread around the world. *The Barefoot Contessa* fared better at the hands of the more kindly disposed Los Angeles critics. In the small Fine Arts Theatre it was able to settle down to a satisfactory if not sensational run.

With the picture launched, I devoted my full time to preparing for the trip. It wasn't made easier by the fact that between Ava and Metro the departure date was changed from

hour to hour. We finally settled on the day after Thanksgiving. United Artists' agreement with Ava stipulated she would do a minimum amount of publicity in Hollywood. "No matter what I say," she explained, "they'll bitch me. Why should I give them the chance? We'll slay them in Tokyo—just as we did in South America. But here I want to lay low."

She did, however, agree to an interview with Joe Hyams of the New York *Herald-Tribune*, an intense, moody young man who had a reputation for at least quoting stars correctly. He used a tape recorder to do his work.

Hyams had met her the first time at Palms Springs, expecting only to spend the afternoon. Instead the interview extended over two days and included an unexpected trip to Tijuana when Ava decided she wanted some tequila against its native background.

Having gotten along so famously with Hyams, Ava, impulsively, gave him permission to do her life story—for which she had frequently received offers. They met once or twice again during her couple of weeks in Hollywood and about a month later when we reached Rome there was Hyams' story ready for her approval, forwarded by Howard Strickling, who urged Ava to reject it. She did, disregarding the amount of effort Hyams had put into it. An "I'm sorry" certainly was in order, but Ava never communicated with Hyams and the inevitable happened.

Hyams husbanded his material, particularly the details of their fling in Mexico, and published it a year or so later in a story called "The Private Hell of Ava Gardner." It was a mean, vitriolic piece but no one could say that Ava had not written it for him.

Hyams was still in the picture, grabbing notes and quotes from Ava, when we left for Tokyo. He came to the airport where Ava and Beatrice and I were being seen off by exactly four people. It had been arranged that way. Although aware of this, Hyams wrote, "It was a motley turnout to bid farewell to the glamour queen of the movies. When Ava—proud and beauti-

ful—stood on the ramp waving good-by, one of the group said, "There goes Ava, leaving nothing behind and nothing to look forward to."

It wasn't quite that way. Standing on the ramp, the smog filling our eyes so we could hardly see, Ava held my arm. "Well, honey, this is the last time I'll ever see this place. I promise you that."

## 9.

Looking down over Tokyo, where we arrived some twenty hours after leaving Seattle, Ava squinted at the first land below. "Hell!" she said. "This looks like North Carolina. I hate this place already."

She lapsed into silence, peering sullenly out of the window. We waited for the United Artists manager to appear. He, like the directors in South America and other cities on our World Tour, had been serviced with my white paper about dim lights, late afternoon receptions and other details of Gardner protocol. But remembering Rio all too vividly, a new point had been added to the instructions—the warning that Miss Gardner would not disembark from the plane until the United Artists manager came aboard and assured her that the ground arrangements were satisfactory.

United Artists' manager in Japan turned out to be a Mr. Schneiderman, a tall, balding, worried-looking man, who squinted at us through small, Japanese-type glasses. He told us nervously that although the rain had thinned the crowd somewhat, Ava could expect a full-throated Toyko reception. The Japanese have always adored Hollywood movies and American

film stars, going back to the days of Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin, and Joe E. Brown.

Ava, as in every place else we had visited, was high in the list of favorites, so the crowd that greeted her was big and enthusiastic—but never disorderly. The fans frequently broke through the police lines, bowing before Ava, presenting her with little bouquets and hand-painted pictures of her. Some pressed little pieces of paper into her hands that later turned out to be poems, hailing her in extravagant, flowery language as the most beautiful of women, the loveliest ever to set foot on the earth.

As she walked with that brisk stride of hers through the crowd, her five feet six towered over both fans and protectors. "Those lovely, little people," she said afterward. "Why they're like dolls. Big me! I could have just pushed them out of the way."

Within a few minutes Ava had decided she didn't hate Tokyo after all, even if the cramped suite at the Imperial Hotel built by Frank Lloyd Wright, and famed for withstanding the Tokyo earthquake of 1923, was totally inadequate to her needs.

With Beatrice along, the list of cronies was enlarged by the mass descent of the Americans working for TWA. Through her travels with Ava (every trip made, if at all possible, by TWA) Beatrice had become known to them in every corner of the globe. The men in Tokyo had, therefore, been alerted to greet our party and they did so with a gusto worthy of a top American business organization.

Adding a baggage section (an extra room across the hall) to our string of rooms solved some problems but never that of fitting Ava into the tiny, sunken bathtub. She looked at it with dismay the first day we arrived and was still bewildered when we left.

I told her the old, old anecdote about the famous American builder who after visiting the Imperial declared, "Harry Thaw shot the wrong architect."

"He wasn't kidding," Ava agreed solemnly as she stood on tiptoe and touched the ceiling easily. "This place was never built for broad-shouldered girls like me."

Mr. Schneiderman's habit of whispering beguiled us from the outset and in hours we had affectionately dubbed him "Whispering Sam." He whispered the program for her stay—two receptions, one for the press, another for important film people, a geisha party and the premiere. When he reached the last detail, his voice dropped so low we had to strain our ears to hear him. "You'll have to appear on the stage, Miss Gardner," he said apprehensively.

The silence was deafening until Ava broke it with a thundering "What? Me on the stage? Are you crazy? I can't do that. I've never been on a stage in my life. I can't even talk on the radio. I'll pass out."

Schneiderman explained there was no other way she could safely visit the theatre without being mobbed. It would be impossible for her to enter through the front and take a seat in a box as in Europe or at home. It was out of the question. She wouldn't be able to get in or out.

Moaning, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God! What will I do?" Ava pointed her finger at me. "You framed this, you bum. I know you did."

There was no use arguing. Ava was too preoccupied with what lay ahead of her and I realized she wasn't as angry as she sounded. Like Queen Gertrude, she was protesting too much and secretly had begun to revel in the idea that, finally, after so many years of resisting the footlights, she had been brought to a position where she was forced to confront them. It was sink or swim.

"I can't sing. I can't dance. What will I do?"

"There's nothing you can do, Ava," I interjected, "except stand out there, look pretty and make a speech about Tokyo. Mr. Schneiderman will interview you—something like that. We'll get an interpreter. I'll write the act."

"Well, get at it fast—and make it short, brother."

The pages tumbled quickly out of the typewriter and I brought them to Ava. Instantly she was all authority, rewriting the speeches, whittling them down, taking out every hint of pretension. It began to sound fine—and so did she. But "Whispering Sam" became more nervous by the minute and his hands fairly shook, even though he was only rehearsing and we were alone in the hotel room.

"My God, Sam, what are you going to be like in a theatre?" Ava asked him.

To put it mildly Sam's performance was perfectly awful and Ava became so concerned with getting him through the "act" that she forgot her own stage fright.

The bugle beads for Tokyo, green and blue stripes, wowed the crowd and Ava's stage debut was sensational—at least in appearance. Surely no one so ravishingly beautiful had ever appeared before at the movie house. Not many heard the dialogue between Ava and Sam; the words were simply drowned out by applause and cheers.

One audible part of the routine really enchanted the Japanese. Ava remarked she adored Japan because it was one country where people could politely take off their shoes, whereupon she blandly slipped out of hers and did the rest of the appearance in stocking feet. Standing there in the middle of the stage, she was radiant and smiling, leaning down now and then to pick up the flowers that poured down profusely from the uppermost balconies. She had such stage presence you would think her entire life had been spent behind the footlights.

Ava, in setting up the Tokyo arrangements, had agreed to visit an Air Force station on her last day, not expecting to be called on for more than sitting around and chatting with the boys. To avoid any semblance of publicity seeking I stayed behind at the hotel, where there were plenty of chores to do.

Long before she was expected back, Ava burst into the room

breathlessly. "Honey, we're going to do a show for the boys."

"A show!" I gasped. "What kind of a show?"

"I don't know—something jazzy. I'm going to sing for them. Nothing could be cornier but they seem to want me to do it. Call so-and-so," and she named an American pianist we had met, "and see if he can get a couple of boys together and make us a combo. Find some place in the hotel where we can rehearse for an hour. I'm going to make up and get into the bugle beads."

The reluctant stage actress was certainly becoming a ham, I mused, delighted that Ava had summoned the courage to do something so alien to her as to "give a show."

The pianist was all too eager to oblige and he assured me he could round up a drummer and an instrumentalist. It was all put together in minutes while Ava worked away at her make-up. When the musicians arrived, she met them in a corner of the mezzanine and they worked over what I came to call Ava's "same three songs," "One More for the Road," "Can't Help Lovin' That Man" and "My Bill," the last two from *Show Boat* in which she had played, but not sung, the old Helen Morgan role of Julie. (Ava had begged Metro to allow her to sing the songs herself but the studio insisted on dubbing her voice, although they did consent to her making a record which, like *Contessa* and *Pandora*, keeps popping up around the world as something rather special in the career of Ava Gardner.)

Someone had to get the show on the road so I, unfortunately, was not present at Ava's debut as a *chanteuse*, but it must have been successful to judge by her rare, bright spirits when she arrived at the airport breathless, just in time to get aboard, and surrounded by a group of adoring soldiers. One of their trench coats was slung over her shoulders, protecting the bugle beads from the slight drizzle that had stayed with us throughout our Tokyo visit.

"You should have seen your old mother," Ava exclaimed happily as she plopped down into her seat and started giving me a blow-by-blow description. "We were great! Those corny musi-

cians and me! Let me tell you, Lena has nothing to worry about, but whatever I did, it was good! We had a ball. Tell you one thing, they'll never forget me."

Hong Kong was an overnight trip and Ava lost no time in settling down in her berth, anxious to catch every minute of sleep she could. By this time she had resigned herself to the fact that there was really no alternative in the Orient to appearing on the stage, even if she continued to accuse me (but not too seriously) of framing her. Hong Kong, moreover, involved two appearances, since separate gala performances of *Contessa* were scheduled at theatres on either side of the river.

We had barely arrived in Hong Kong, that fabulous Free Port where the finest linen suits can be tailored in twenty-four hours at a cost of \$25 or \$35 and where it is every visitor's dream to arrive nude with a checkbook and begin a wardrobe and jewel collection from scratch, when Ava promptly fell into the Hong Kong tradition. And the first things she ordered were Chinese dresses.

"Honey," she said, "if you're going to put me on the stage, just wait until you see me in one of those gowns."

And see her I did—along with a theatreful of enthusiastic Chinese who literally went wild when she came on the stage in the traditional, tight-fitting, brightly colored, slit-skirt silk gown. The dress probably cost all of \$25, but the gesture bowled them over and another great news picture hit the worldwide press circuits—Ava in Chinese costume—thanks, as always, to her unerring instinct for show business.

The battered old manuscript of Ava's "act" in Tokyo served both the Hong Kong theatres, with the names of the people and city changed. What Ava said didn't matter; it could have been the alphabet. The crowd had come simply to drink in her ravishing beauty.

Warm faces from home had been few and far between during our travels, so when Ava spotted the unmistakable shock of

white hair and leathery face that could only belong to William "Hopalong Cassidy" Boyd dining at the far end of our hotel restaurant, she immediately implored me to invite him over.

Hopalong responded with alacrity as did his lovely wife, Grace. Hopalong was making personal appearances all over the Orient, carrying with him his collection of gimmicks: "Hopalong" buttons, medals, cowboy suits, etc. I had known him from my reviewing days in Hollywood so there was little trouble in starting genial conversation—not that Ava needed much prodding. "Hopalong, how do you do it? Just tell me how can you stand out there and face a crowd of thousands and not shake yourself right out of your boots."

Hopalong promptly put her right about the size of his crowd by quoting the exact figures of attendance the night before at the stadium where he had appeared. "It's a cinch, honey, all you do is to fix your eye on one person in the audience. Let me tell you, it never fails. Just play straight to him and don't look at another soul. Honey, you can't miss."

Ava still shook her head. "One person in the audience! Heck, I'm too frightened even to look out across the footlights. I just stand there and quake."

There was one jarring note at Hong Kong when, over my stern, firmly worded instructions that Ava would not accept any social invitations, the United Artists people scheduled a luncheon party for her at the residence of the Governor-General of Hong Kong. It was booked on the day of the premiere and the physical problem of getting her there, back to the hotel in time to dress and make up and then into the theatre was enormous. There was absolutely no way of fulfilling the invitation which, after all, had been imposed on her. I talked to the Secretary General's aide, who appeared to understand the situation and did not seem too upset. Nevertheless, the story leaked to the newspapers which, in reporting the incident, referred to Ava's snubbing the Governor-General.

When she saw the first front-page item, instead of storming, as she might justifiably have done, Ava simply sighed and put the newspaper away as though the gesture would blot it from her mind. "They never miss a bet," she sighed. Having seen the same snide insinuations happen so often, I could only agree.

Apart from this incident, the Hong Kong newspapers were lovely to her, making much of the fact that Ava was one of the few stars in movie history of the city to arrive on time for her press conference—and the first to be there early.

At our next stand, Singapore, the performance was repeated and Ava drew an ecstatic press, beginning on the front pages with huge photographs and stories running over into every section of the newspapers. But, at the time, we were less concerned with the success of the trip than that we had no reservations to get out of the Orient and on to Europe where there were fast dates for *Contessa* premieres and the equally important date when I had to deliver Ava to MGM in London.

All the airlines were interested in helping her and finally Air India came forward with the only workable suggestion. They would convert some seats in the rear of the plane into berths, an enclosed one for Ava, and some sleeping accommodations for Beatrice and me. We eagerly accepted the offer and the berth they fixed up turned out to be a sumptuous affair, enclosed in brocaded curtains and much larger than the ordinary accommodations. Ava quickly made herself at home and announced, as she had across the Pacific, that she would sleep every mile of the trip to Rome.

That I knew wasn't going to make the trip easy for me, since although she wasn't announced to appear at any of the places the plane stopped, Thailand, Bombay, Karachi, Cairo and Athens, you could be certain that large crowds would collect at every stop on the plane's log. Ava Gardner could no more travel incognito through the Orient than she could conceal her driving from Portofino to Florence.

Ava, sensing my perplexity, looked at me with a mischievous expression. "Tell you what you do! Give them the beauty lecture."

"The Beauty Lecture" had become a standard part of our publicity work and evolved from the fact that Ava could not possibly fulfill all the requests for exclusive interviews that came during our long travels. To satisfy some important journalists who could not afford to give their readers the impression that they had not enjoyed an intimate close-up of Ava, I was offered as a substitute, with authority to make statements that might appear to come directly from Ava.

It was not exactly original strategy, since movie fan magazines always have written their own stories about the stars from their own special angles, submitting them for approval to the personalities involved. Thus picture people, through the years, have appeared to the public as experts on everything from home economics to singing and the problems of unwed mothers. I would find, consequently, reporters saying to me, "And now, Miss Gardner, what is your favorite picture and who is your favorite actress?"

Both were answered according to standard Hollywood procedure. An actress' favorite picture is always her latest, and, as politicians can not go wrong in endorsing "Motherhood" and "Babies," there is the overwhelming image of Greta Garbo to lean upon as favorite actress.

In Ava's case, her admiration was sincere. Although inclined to dismiss many pre-Gardner stars on the screen as corny, she admitted having adored the dancing of Ginger Rogers and worshiped Greta Garbo. Given the opportunity to study the latter's work at Metro where her pictures are regular parts of the studio's training program, she saw them over and over again.

Once when she lived at Palm Springs, a friend mentioned that Garbo was anxious to meet her. Delighted and impressed, Ava extended an invitation for a weekend which Garbo, just as promptly, accepted. Ava sat on pins and needles, biting her

nails throughout the week, wondering how she would ever entertain her legendary guest. "Nothing was easier," she said. "Garbo simply walked in the house, shook my hand in that strong warm fashion that only European women know how to do and she was immediately at home."

Garbo evidently kept to herself, bathed in the pool *sans* bra, showed up at mealtime, retired early, took long early morning walks and quietly went away—as mysterious and awesome to a star of a new generation as she was when her firmament illuminated Hollywood more brightly than the whole galaxy of her celluloid sisters.

Parrying questions about Garbo, even inquiries about "your relationship with Frank Sinatra, Miss Gardner," was easy but one question always stumped me: "How do you keep so beautiful?" I once asked Ava about it in South America. She laughed. "Tell them I stay up all night and drink and dance until all hours of the morning. That's what I'm supposed to do—so what the hell! Let's give it to them."

Naturally, that kind of advice wouldn't set too well, so between trips I collected a set of tips used by John Powers for his models. I combined this with some advice I remembered from interviewing Earl Carroll years before as well as from prodding Ava into some straight-from-the-shoulder information.

Ava insisted that the choice of make-up was a matter of taste and mood, that if a woman felt gay and bright she should let herself go with bright lipstick, strong eye make-up. For conservative occasions she recommended her own technique of utter simplicity, carefully and meticulously applied. For bedtime ablutions she urged a strong soap-and-water cleaning for the skin; for morning, just a good once-over with cold water and no soap. Powers lent some general tips about grooming and Earl Carroll supplied the observation that no hair preparation can produce the luster of daily brushing.

I used to sit with Earl Carroll in his office, high in the Earl Carroll Theatre next to the lighting booths, and watch him as he

carefully made notes on the appearance of his girls, noting every out-of-place hair. And so I could speak with authority and conviction. "The Beauty Lecture" was successful wherever it played.

So all along the route as Ava slept, I climbed out of the plane, brushed my suit, saw that my tie was in place and, like a pitch-man, went into my routine with the newspaper correspondents.

"No," I said over and over, "Miss Gardner is not disembarking! There are no plans for visiting this city and there never have been." Maintaining this point was difficult because no one really wanted to believe it. With some effort on Ava's part she might have put in an appearance but she was obstinate, and except at Bombay, stuck to her guns. There, instead of meeting the press when she disembarked, she persisted in eluding them as we visited the home of a United Artists representative, situated right on Back Bay.

There were two sides to her position. She had traveled the same territory before and remembered wryly, "Hell, when we went through here to Rome, I was with Frank. At Cairo, the steward said we were sleeping and one photographer tried his damndest to get a picture of us in bed."

At Karachi, it looked for a time as though Ava would be forced to get up and submit to police and customs inspection. But I prevailed upon the authorities to allow her to remain on the plane. Air India hastily improvised an air-conditioning system by hauling up a machine beside the plane to pump air into it during the long wait.

Every bit of luggage aboard the plane had to be removed and inspected, a long and tedious procedure made more annoying by the customs people's preoccupation with Ava's wardrobe. They pawed over the gowns, discussing and showing them to one another, forgetting evidently that they were supposed to be searching for contraband.

With the Orient, Cairo, and Athens behind us, we were on the last lap of the jump and Ava, refreshed after the long rest,

eagerly looking forward to Rome and a reunion with her chums. The fans weren't out in the huge numbers that greeted Ava the first time she came to Rome for *Contessa*, but there were enough of them to create the typical Gardner-generated aura of excitement.

Bob Haggiag's cheery face and stocky figure poked through the crowd to join us aboard the plane. Beside him was Maria Pia de Giorgio, the brisk, efficient publicity woman for United Artists in Rome. On hand, too, were the musicians from the Piccolo Budapest, a restaurant featuring Hungarian food and gypsy music and a favorite Roman hangout of Ava's. The musicians had appeared in *Contessa* and thus became part of the family.

We hastened on to the Grand where United Artists had reserved the very best suite in the hotel, one neither of us had seen before. It was sumptuous, extravagantly Roman, and Ava reacted to it happily as a welcome contrast to cramped quarters in the Far East.

Not much of a program had been planned for Rome although our stay was to be longer—the idea being to give Ava as much rest as possible before tackling the remainder of the tour: Stockholm, a U. S. Army Hospital at Wiesbaden, Berlin and, finally, London. Rome went off easily and, with all her cronies around, I hoped Ava would do something feminine for a change and get herself a date.

Repeatedly during our travels she complained that she could never find anyone to go out with for an ordinary evening of fun. Although we both found each other good friends and good company and were forced to spend a great deal of time together, an actress no more enjoys dating her press agent than he does spending an evening with the actress.

I told her candidly what I thought—that one doesn't meet people, not even if one is Ava Gardner, locked away in a hotel suite, sleeping around the clock. Getting around requires effort, things like showing up at lunch, as outrageous as that might sound in Ava's nocturnal way of life.

But this Rome turned out to be no different from the one of our earlier stand. Luis Miguel Dominguin had returned to Spain and married Lucia Bosé, who once had been engaged to Walter Chiari. Chiari wasn't in Rome, and Ava's escorts became Haggiag and me. And headquarters remained the suite at the Grand from which Ava stirred but rarely.

One visitor who came at my invitation was an Italian producer named Goffredo Lombardo, who had in mind a story of the life and time of the Spanish artist Francesco Goya. It was not an original project insofar as Ava was concerned. Almost from the moment she arrived in Rome for *Contessa*, she had been visualized by a number of people as being the ideal Duchess of Alba. Among the film men with this conception was Joesph Mankiewicz. Ava's discussion with Lombardo limited itself to a promise to consider any submitted script.

Having heard of her success on the stages of the Orient, the United Artists officials in Europe were all for carrying out the personal appearance idea in Europe. Wisely, Ava put her foot down and said she would stick to the prearranged program, attending the premieres and gala performances—that and nothing more.

We headed for Stockholm, a place Ava had qualms about from the moment she was told she was going there. Besides disliking northern countries, Scandinavia had been the scene of some of her bitterest quarrels with Sinatra and the memories they churned could not have been pleasant. I was not surprised therefore, when, from the moment we arrived, she seemed unhappy and ill at ease, unsure of herself, although always trying to put her best foot forward against deep emotional tides.

By bracing herself hard for the work, she came through handsomely, looked gorgeous in the newspaper photographs, and the Swedish press stated in bold headlines that she had brought the Midnight Sun to the North at a time of the year when the region was cloaked in its longest nights.

We were to leave for Wiesbaden on the morning of December

24th, Ava's birthday. The night before, we enjoyed a quiet dinner with the United Artists directors in the hotel dining room and Ava's manner showed no signs that a tempest was brewing. I escorted Ava to her room and went on to mine down the hall. I was in it only a few minutes when the telephone rang and I heard her say, "Get over here, right away."

I found Ava in a fury. "I want a berth on the plane tomorrow. If I don't get a berth I won't go. Call them right away and make sure I have one."

I had worked on the berth all that afternoon and had had almost 100 per cent assurance from the airline that one would be arranged for Ava, although berths were not customary equipment on the short haul between Stockholm and Wiesbaden—a trip of some four hours. At that hour of the night I could expect to accomplish no more than had already been done. I tried to explain to Ava. She refused to listen, insisting that I call.

Finally I said that I wouldn't and left. All night long my telephone rang but I didn't answer.

When we met the next morning to drive to the airport, Ava wasn't speaking to anyone, much less to me. I told her what to expect at the airport—an airline Santa Claus would greet her and take a picture. She nodded agreement. I made no mention of the berth, simply presuming that it would be there—and if not, I would pay the consequences at the proper time.

Praise Allah! The berth was installed and ready when we arrived. Ava's only comment was "Hmpff."

The silence continued throughout the trip and no mention was made of her birthday. I had two gifts for her, one for her birthday and the other for Christmas. The first was a little stone; the second a hand mirror that I had spent vastly more time finding.

Although the Stockholm airfield was covered with ice, the sun was shining brightly and the air not too cold when we set down at Copenhagen. Naturally, there were newspapermen there, spending Christmas Eve in the faint hope of getting a

photograph and a story about Ava. They were a cheery group, who eventually became more interested in celebrating the holiday than in Ava after I broke the news that she wasn't leaving the plane. Ava would have enjoyed the impromptu party we put together, highlighted by a dance on the ice performed by Beatrice and me. Ava, in her window seat, turned now and then from the magazine she wasn't really reading and viewed us coldly.

At Wiesbaden we put ourselves into the charge of the Army, and I disappeared—this by prearrangement—since, as in Tokyo, Ava wanted no part of a press agent's hand during her visit to the soldiers' hospital.

She was gone for hours, it seemed, and when I eventually caught up with her, I found out why. She had insisted on going to the psychiatric ward alone. The doctors told me that Ava's visit did more good than all the Christmas trappings that had been created in the ward to give the men a flimsy illusion of home.

As the result of this experience Ava began to thaw, and she was almost her old self when we reached Berlin. The next morning I gave her my presents and they served as the final peace offering. I had already received mine from Ava a week or so before in Rome when there arrived a handsome set of Gucci luggage with my initials. The selection had been inspired by Ava's seeing me dash into her room one day along the way and shovel through the luggage until I found an airline bag. From it I extracted a suit.

"Do you mean to say you pack suits that way?" she asked.

"Of course, doesn't everybody?"

Ava shook her head as though this was the last straw in our gypsy life.

When she presented the bags to me she warned seriously, "Now, don't ever let me see you packing in an airline bag again. Do you hear me?"

I promised.

On our first or second night in Berlin, Ava went out dancing with one of the members of the plane crew. The press reception was held the following afternoon. The United Artists representative in Germany had things firmly under control, so I was on the sidelines when a newspaperman came up and introduced himself. Like the Champs-Élysées vendors of dirty postcards he opened a magazine slyly and there in the center fold was a picture of Ava dancing in a Berlin night club with her shoes off.

"I'd hate to publish this," the man said. "Maybe we can come to some arrangement."

The picture was no more compromising than Gainsborough's "Duchess"—except that Ava looked stupid, like a small penguin looking up at the tall Army officer.

I told the photographer I doubted Ava would mind whether he published the picture or not. The man slunk away and I saw him worm into a position at Ava's table where he evidently repeated the performance, unfolding the magazine so no one but Ava could see the picture. By her own account later she told him, "Print it if you like," and left the table.

Two rebuffs weren't enough and again that evening the photographer telephoned to try to sell us the picture. The United Artists men coldly rejected his offer. "Don't pay a damned cent," Ava had warned them. "It's a bad picture. I look stupid, I know. But nobody's going to blackmail me. And let me tell you something else. It won't reproduce well. So there's nothing to get excited about."

The picture was run the next morning on the front page of a Berlin daily. The penguin in the picture could have been Martha Schmidt or Ava Gardner. As always, Ava seemed right. The picture died that day, never receiving the world-wide play the blackmailing photographer dreamed it would. The incident came to light and the man was fired.

From Berlin the Army plane flew us to London where, after a few perfunctory interviews, the tour was over. Max Youngstein had promised Ava a publicity-free trip to Paris with me as

escort, but our hopes for this evaporated when Ava received a telegram from George Cukor requesting her to stay in London for conferences on *Bhowani Junction*. Ava wasn't happy about the instructions and impetuously announced she would have her reservations about getting along with Cukor.

After considerable persuasion on my part and much hemming and hawing about the fact that it wasn't in the "budget," United Artists came through with a gift of a silver tray as a souvenir of Ava's trips in behalf of *The Barefoot Contessa*. It was engraved with a map of the world, showing 52,000 miles she had traveled.

I headed back for New York. At the airport I was ushered into the V.I.P. room and in a far corner I saw another of the screen's most celebrated glamour girls, Jane Russell. She was sitting quietly, reading a book, eliciting no more attention than any other passenger.

I opened my own book and thought with amusement, Hell, this is dull. If Gardner were here, we'd be kicking up a storm!

*III. Aiva in Europe*



B

BEYOND the vague promise to meet one day in Spain where Ava said she would toss a flamenco party for me, there were no plans for us to see each other again. Ava returned to the MGM fold. The London office took over command the moment I left, after making sure United Artists paid her hotel bill to the last day of the arrangement.

After arriving in New York I terminated my association with Figaro, Inc. Mankiewicz was then in Hollywood, hard at work on *Guys and Dolls*, and his company had gone into that theatrical limbo called "inactive at present."

I believed then, as I had before, that I had finished my work with Ava. But as other chores fell into my lap, Ava did not as I expected she would, fade into the dim past. In my mind I kept comparing what can only be described as "her operation" with the publicity projects I was working on, and they all came off second best. No one else seemed to possess Ava's extraordinary capacity for capturing attention so effectively. You didn't generate news about Ava. It just happened.

Ava and the *Bhowani Junction* troupe were away in Pakistan and I could recognize from the items that sifted back to the States, the publicity clichés centering on the hardships the company was living under, that Ava was working hard and,

contrary to what she had said to me, getting along famously with George Cukor, an uncannily skilled hand at directing women stars.

*War and Peace* turned out to be my next foreign assignment. Despite the fact that it was heralded as the most important picture of the year, if not of all time, I accepted the job with reservations and forebodings, since the project was promoted by an Italian producer named Ponti De Laurentiis who, I knew from having had contact with him during *Ulysses*, was not the easiest person in the world to get along with. To make my doubts worse, the day after I signed the contract, I was offered that delightful circus picture *Trapeze*, with Bert Lancaster, Gina Lollobrigida and Tony Curtis, which was to be filmed in Paris. As a project it was much more down my theatrical alley than the ponderous Tolstoi novel. But at least the job compelled me to sit down and read *War and Peace* and to wonder how in heaven's name it could ever be compressed into a motion picture script.

At that time *War and Peace* was the center of an inter-industry battle. Several companies held rights to the Tolstoi title in America, under the motion picture registration arrangement which gives preference to producers on a first-come, first-served basis. Paramount then was fourth on the list and held distribution rights to the De Laurentiis film (presuming it was made) everywhere in the world except Italy. They decided to utilize publicity as a means of pinning down claims that the project had actually started, a device that conceivably would improve its position on the list, although the project was far from ready and there were still kinks in the contract to be straightened out. The major point—the stars—had not been determined.

Paramount sent me first to Hollywood to stir up interest by convincing the press there that my assignment to the picture meant that the Italian version was really on the level. More important, that it would start before another *War and Peace* being planned by Mike Todd. Todd was, even then, in Yugo-

slavia attempting to persuade Marshal Tito to lend his army for the battle sequences. Robert Sherwood was with him, writing a screenplay.

After Hollywood, I was scheduled to project the same idea in London and Paris, spending a week in each place making the newspaper and magazine rounds before heading for Rome. Since part of the Paris week would include Easter, I was looking forward to the trip.

I had just checked in at the International Airport when a message came through asking me to call Paramount in New York immediately. I was given the news that De Laurentis had signed Audrey Hepburn for the then fabulous figure of \$300,000 to play the role of Natasha and that her husband of a few months, Mel Ferrer, had been engaged for Andrea.

I was requested to cut my stay in London, skip Paris and head immediately for Rome. I dutifully followed directions, knowing full well it meant I was simply giving up a delightful Easter in Paris. The new schedule would bring me into Rome on Good Friday where everything would be closed until the following Tuesday morning.

This hunch proved true. Dino had gone away for the holidays, leaving word that I should do likewise and meet him next week. But along with the information I discovered Ava was in town en route from Pakistan to London, lodged at the Excelsior Hotel.

It took me seconds to hotfoot it over there, only to find Ava bedded down with a bad cold.

"Wouldn't you know I'd get a cold in Rome? Here I've been in the wilds of Pakistan, working my head off, never having a day off and now that I have a free week and could have some fun, I'm laid up. And wouldn't you know Metro would book me at the Excelsior? Even United Artists stashed me away at the Grand."

Regardless of her indisposition, Ava was happy and excited about *Bhowani Junction*. Obviously the main reason was Cukor.

"I've never met such a man," she raved. "He can do anything. He watches every detail from start to finish. He never sits down. I've never been so happy with a director in my life."

Hearing Ava talk so delightedly about her work and seeing her enthused was a novelty. Although I had been with her through only one picture, she had talked enough about others to make me know how she felt about work, conditions, and especially directors.

In the few serious conversations about her career, Ava most deplored that she had so rarely worked with a good director. An exception was John Ford, but when she first began *Mogambo* she loathed him and confessed she cried all through the first few days until Ford took her aside and complimented her. "From that moment on, he was wonderful, directing me, talking to me, making me understand. I guess that's how he works. He has to be top man—and he should be. He just wanted to make sure I knew it."

Ava passed her days in Rome in bed nursing her cold. Toward the end of the week, sitting in the suite having dinner, she said, "You know, I'm going to get up tomorrow. What do you say we do some sightseeing? You know, all the time I've been here I've never seen anything."

"You! Sightseeing! That's too much, but I am going to hold you to it," I answered, surprised but pleased at her unexpected burst of interest in something besides the routine of Rome's night life. "But you'll have to break the rules. We ought to start early; maybe even go out to lunch."

"Agreed," smiled Ava.

As usual when she made a date she really intended keeping, Ava was dressed, ready and with a camera flung over her shoulder when the car came to pick us up. "You! With a camera! What's happened?" I exclaimed. "This is one thing I never expected to see."

"I've never taken a picture in my life but I'm going to try," she said, holding the camera awkwardly.

We drove straight to Vatican City where Ava wanted to see the Sistine Chapel. There Ava, who has made fame and headlines eluding cameramen, demanding their films when snapped unaware, blandly raised her Rollei and took a shot of the Michelangelo ceiling, a totally futile gesture in view of the poor lighting.

In seconds the Vatican guards descended on her, seized the camera, removed the film, exposed it and handed it back to her, shock written in their faces that Ava Gardner would do such a thing. They had, of course, recognized her. "Well, I guess I shouldn't have done it," she said meekly afterwards, "but I wish they had let me save some of the other shots on the roll. I made a few in the hotel this morning."

We prowled around Piazza San Pietro, then went on to the Forum. Ava snapped pictures of me and I took pictures of Ava, just like German tourists who come to Rome armed with cameras and umbrellas and proceed to take thousands of pictures of each other.

That night we did the night-club circuit, but quietly, and the evening was over uncharacteristically early. Ava had to be up the next morning to catch her plane to London. Before she left, we looked up my birthday on the calendar, found that it fell over a weekend in September and decided to meet in Madrid to celebrate it with that long-promised flamenco date.

Ava had about eight to ten weeks of work ahead of her in London. "Then I'm going to Madrid and find myself a place to live." Her mind had been firmly made up about living in Europe, she said. "Even if Metro wants me to do a picture in Hollywood, I'll only go there for the job."

Meeting Ava again showed me how continentalized she had become, although she was not exactly unsophisticated about Europe when she arrived in Italy for *Contessa*, having previously spent a long time in Spain for the filming of *Pandora* and in England for *Knights of the Round Table*. "You'd never believe how naïve I was when I first came to Europe," she had told me.

"And you know I didn't want to come. All I knew of the world then was North Carolina, New York, and Hollywood. They seemed to be enough.

"I was frightened to death and, of course, did all the wrong things. I wanted to go to a night club in Paris but had the name mixed up so Beatrice and I spent the evening in a dirty, smelly bistro filled with strange people but still sure we were where we were supposed to be."

It was understandable that Ava, who was searching for a gentler way of life than she had known before, should seek the answer in Europe. She had no ties in Hollywood. With the exception of Beatrice, all her family had stayed in North Carolina. There they had raised their families. Ava had become a distant, although famous relative, heard from infrequently and seen but rarely.

In comparing the two worlds, she never failed to mention what impressed her most—the politeness of Europeans as contrasted with Americans, especially those she met in the movie business with their crude manners and rough, vulgar language. "Those poor Hollywood wives," she said. "No wonder they commit suicide," making reference to the recent sad death of the wife of a young executive. "They don't have husbands. They marry business machines who deal in beautiful women. No wonder they are frustrated and jealous."

The week in Rome showed me a more serious, quiet, reserved and thoughtful Ava than I had known before. It was a heart-warming time.

Audrey Hepburn and Mel Ferrer had been honeymooning in Switzerland when they were signed for *War and Peace*, and shortly afterward they announced they would move down to Rome within a month or so to take a house in the Alban Hills outside the city for the rest of their honeymoon, several weeks before the start of the picture. No one among the production wanted them so early, least of all publicity, since stars require enormous personal attention, time that would take my depart-

ment away from the difficult job of preparing the written material for the picture.

The Hepburn-Ferrer marriage, coming in the wake of their appearance in the stage play *Ondine*, had produced considerable controversy in the press. Ferrer had been royally thumped by some columnists for his alleged unwillingness to permit Audrey to take a solo curtain call. When their marriage became known it was said that Ferrer became a heavy, a kind of Svengali to the young, inexperienced star. That he was being paid \$100,000—a big jump in salary for him—for his part in *War and Peace* was another indication in the heightening criticism that he was riding on Audrey's skirts. She was then the hottest new star in the business.

The negotiations for her appearance in *War and Peace* were as complicated as any I had ever heard of. An English company held a commitment with Audrey that predated her Paramount contract. They agreed to relinquish it only in exchange for the distribution rights to *War and Peace* in Great Britain—a staggering concession if Audrey were to play the part at all. An old movie hand could only observe that the power once wielded by Louis B. Mayer, the Warners, the Schenks, had now passed into the hands of their onetime vassals—young, sweet girls like Audrey who possessed no power beyond that wonderful intangible known as artistry. It was a triumph of talent over business.

I had not met Audrey but remembered Mel Ferrer from Hollywood where I had known him as a bright, charming, show-wise actor and director. As a matter of fact I had given him his first Hollywood publicity in my Los Angeles *Daily News* column and he had not forgotten it. We shared an interest in old-time vaudeville and I looked forward to meeting him again and matching memories on the names of old acts, songs and who did what in the heyday of the two-a-day.

I had read a great deal about Audrey, had seen her in *Roman Holiday* and *Sabrina*, and of course had been beguiled by her elfin charm. I could see she was a superb actress and from all I

could unearth, serious and ambitious about her career. This, I believed, would be a welcome change from Ava and her supreme indifference.

I had been in Rome several weeks and was just getting the feel of the difficult, confused, politics-ridden De Laurentiis organization when out of the blue the Paramount representative called to announce that I was to leave the following day for Marrakech to join Alfred Hitchcock's location for *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, a remake of one of Hitchcock's earlier triumphs that had been rewritten around Marrakech, the Souks and London with James Stewart and Doris Day in the starring roles.

I protested that this was a mistake, that *War and Peace* was a full-time job which ought not to be interrupted at this particular stage of the preparations, especially in view of the imminent arrival of Hepburn and Ferrer. De Laurentiis, however, was so eager to get me off the payroll and save a few dollars, even for the short period involved, it seemed useless to argue further. So off I went to Casablanca. En route I met some of "Hitch's" production crew—men who had worked with the old suspense master since his first days in Hollywood and were, as I came to be later, rapturous about their chief. To be transported suddenly from Rome's movie world to Marrakech was one fascinating experience. Until then I had seen nothing of North Africa and knew it only as a turbulent part of the world run by the French and the scene of the old operetta, *The Desert Song*.

I was among the first shipment of crew and we quickly lodged ourselves in a lovely hotel with a warm, sunny patio and waited for our headliners: Hitchcock, Stewart, and Doris Day. What impressed me most about the arrangements was the total absence of excitement and confusion. Although most of Hitchcock's men had never seen Marrakech before, they seemed to know exactly what they were doing and where they were going.

Some contrast to the disorganized preparations for *War and Peace* in Rome.

Hitchcock appeared from London the next day and told me that Stewart was flying into Casablanca on an early evening plane and that Doris Day was scheduled to arrive the following morning by boat from Tangier with her husband, Marty Melchior, and their son. Back to Casablanca I drove to pick up Stewart and his wife, who posed willingly for the TV setup, spoke on the radio and met the press graciously. We had a quiet dinner at the hotel and next morning they departed by car for Marrakech while I headed for the wharf to greet Doris Day.

Doris had been a band singer until director Michael Curtiz unveiled her as a singing actress in *Romance on the High Seas*, a picture he had long wanted to make with Ava Gardner. But despite repeated requests to MGM, Curtiz could not obtain Ava on a loan-out deal. Evidently tiring of carrying on the negotiations and prodded by his bosses, Warner Brothers, into finally doing the picture or forgetting it, Curtiz decided to take a chance on an unknown—and that is how Doris Day entered the motion picture business.

I knew little about Doris beyond these basic facts of her career, and beyond the few of her musical pictures I had reviewed. Like most critics, I found Doris to be an amiable, freckle-faced young woman with a fine straightforward style of singing. Of all Hollywood stars, she seemed the least likely to appear in a Hitchcock picture. But the role of a Mary Martin-type musical comedy actress married to an American businessman suited her personality and talents, as Hitchcock clearly had seen.

Doris was warm and wonderfully friendly when I met her on the deck of the boat—happy to see, as she put it, “an American face.” Her husband, Marty Melchior, was a big genial handsome-looking man, right off Broadway, with whom I immediately felt at home.

I should have accompanied Doris and Marty on the car trip

to Marrakech but couldn't because even stars sometimes take second place to mechanical requirements of the movie business. I had to collect, of all things, a shipment of dried ice flown to us from Paris to store our Technicolor negative. Getting the ice to Marrakech was vastly too important to entrust to Arab handlers, so I agreed to take over the job when the production department asked me.

We were all lodged together at the same hotel—the American crew, "Hitch," Doris Day, the Stewarts, Daniel Gelin, the French star—and for the first time in my European career I was on the inside of chic, first-class movie making. Tempers and temperament simply didn't exist. When the slightest thing went wrong Hitchcock, dressed impeccably in slacks, white shirt and neatly tied cravat, and looking as though he had never heard of the hot desert sun that was burning everyone to cinders, would say very quietly, "Don't get excited. After all, it's only a movie."

You need to have been in the movie business for years to understand not only the wisdom but the rarity of Hitchcock's simple remark. It was rewarding to see solid, London-born Hitchcock call the turn on the notion that movie making is the single most important event in life—its people a law unto themselves.

Our locations centered mainly around the Souks, the fabulous Marrakech bazaar, a labyrinthine collection of stalls, stores, snake charmers, musicians playing primitive instruments, blood-letter, barbers, storytellers. No one could enter it without a guide and we had a dozen or so Arab boys engaged for that job.

Jimmy Stewart, towering above everyone, enjoyed the whole experience enormously, but Doris was less sanguine. She longed, she said, for Burbank. She couldn't eat the food and she was afraid to venture forth into the night life, even to the good French restaurants.

As I wandered through the city, visiting all the out-of-the-way places, eating Arab food, seeing the native dances, I could only imagine myself what Marrakech life would have been like

had Gardner been along. This was one place in which I knew Ava would be a busy and enthusiastic sightseer.

All too quickly *The Man Who Knew Too Much* closed its tents and left the Souks. This was the beginning of the Moroccan trouble in 1944. The *Ramadan*, the long fast of the Arabs, was about to come to an end. The *Ramadan* is a period when Arabs are forbidden to eat during the day but compensate for their abstinence by long sessions of dissipation at night. The location work was not yet finished when Hitchcock, warned by the authorities of impending trouble, dispatched still-camera men to photograph the sites still remaining.

"We'll do them at home," he said casually, again showing a viewpoint totally unlike that of the usual film man who would have insisted on staying. "Hitch" made arrangements for a chartered plane to carry the troupe to London. The next day, the end of the *Ramadan*, all hell broke loose in Morocco. I was already safely out, having left for Paris by regular airliner in order to do some work there before rejoining the company in London.

In Paris I heard that good old Ava was in London and promptly telegraphed: HONEY, UNTIL YOU'VE SPENT AN ARABIAN NIGHT, YOU'VE NEVER SPENT A NIGHT. SEE YOU IN LONDON TOMORROW.

When I reached London and located Ava by telephone on the set at Metro she said, "Get yourself out here" (meaning Metro's studios way out in suburban London). "I want to hear everything about those Arabian Nights." I explained that because of work I couldn't get there, but that I would meet her in town her first free day. She knew which one—she could always tell you her days off—and we met at the Savoy for cocktails.

As in Rome, there was an entirely new Ava in front of me. The Cukor magic and his fame for handling women had certainly worked wonders. I remembered reviewing what critics called the Cukor touch and could see it in front of me when

Ava introduced us and I bowed before his charm and dynamic personality.

Any man who could transform Ava into the mood in which I found her—bouncy, vital, interested and excited—was worth his weight in gold. She seemed simply to be happy; that is, completely 100 per cent uncomplicated happy. There was no romance in her life. I asked her that pointedly. "Hell, honey, who's got time with Cukor? He's so busy. It's all you can do to keep up with him."

For someone with Ava's reputation for wearing out her friends, this was a rare compliment. After Ava left Madrid following her busy months with Luis Miguel Dominguin, someone asked him what he was going to do. "Sleep for three days," answered the bullfighter, "maybe longer."

On the other hand, Cukor insisted that Ava meet him on his own terms, not hers. That made the difference.

Marlene Dietrich was playing at the Café de Paris and I asked Ava if I could take her. "I'd love to see Dietrich," she enthused. We found a free night on her calendar and I tackled the business of getting reservations. To get good seats at the sold-out cabaret I would have to use Ava's name so I automatically became the press agent again and asked Ava's permission. "That's all right, it doesn't matter," Ava said when I explained my dilemma. "They'll probably get the press there and there'll be a big fuss but there's no polite way of getting out of it. I don't mind."

As a press agent I could only think of the news value of a picture showing Ava meeting Dietrich for the first time, but I held my peace and said nothing to the Café de Paris's management about Ava's benign attitude toward being photographed. I had to reject their request that Ava introduce Marlene. Noel Coward had started the policy of having a guest star present Marlene at each performance but both Ava and I knew she would be too nervous to manage it.

At the last minute Ava decided she wanted to go to a Spanish

place nearby in Piccadilly Circus to have a quick drink before Marlene did her performance. It was an absurd idea and, ever the press agent, I worried whether I would ever get her back to the Café de Paris. She could easily transform the evening into a flamenco party. And if she didn't return I could well imagine how the press would latch onto the incident. **AVA SNUBS MARLENE** would be tomorrow's headline.

We were, however, only minutes late when we returned to the Café de Paris, and Marlene, wiser evidently in the ways of women than I, had held her entrance for that brief period. Down the steps she came, air pockets billowing her sheer evening gown to show the fabulous Dietrich legs and figure. Ava gasped, "Damn, I wish I had legs like that."

Dietrich's show had played all over the world and scarcely needed Ava's endorsement, but she wholeheartedly gave it. "Such wonderful hoke. Get that showmanship. Look at the way she moves . . . isn't she superb!"

Finally, there came the climax when Marlene, having finished "Lili Marlene," and not yet having sung "Falling in Love Again," disappeared up the stairs. Ava was ready to dart out that minute. I pressed her to stay. "You can't. The act isn't finished yet."

"But what can she do now?" asked Ava, not believing there was an encore although the whole Café de Paris's atmosphere was staged for a second Dietrich entrance.

"You'll see," I promised as the orchestra continued playing and replaying the theme.

Finally, after the musicians had almost exhausted themselves with reprieves and the audience had wearied of clapping, Marlene appeared at the top of the other side of the Café de Paris, impeccably done up in tails, top hat, and white tie to sing her famous song from her first big movie hit, *The Blue Angel*.

"She wouldn't dare," exclaimed Ava breathlessly. "Damn it, that's fabulous . . . just fabulous."

Before Dietrich had finished, the press agent of the café was

at our side. "Miss Dietrich would like to meet you, Miss Gardner," he said in a hushed tone of voice, as though he were inviting Ava to meet Queen Elizabeth. By then, Ava had become completely enchanted by the Dietrich apparition, and quickly went backstage to meet Marlene. Although I had never met Marlene before, I had to introduce the two stars. The press agent was too awed to speak up.

Marlene looked at Ava, stretched out a hand and stroked her cheek. "You are so beautiful."

Ava had nothing to say except the usual "You are wonderful." After we left, Ava impulsively asked me to go back and invite Marlene out with us. I retraced my steps to her dressing room. She was still there, taking off her trousers and getting into a gown. "No, my dear, I'm sorry," she said. "I must go to Paris tomorrow morning and be back in the evening for the show. Thank Ava so much. We shall meet another time."

Ava was only a little disappointed and we went on to some Piccadilly Circus bistros for the rest of the evening and the only observation further from Ava about Dietrich was: "Hmmm . . . it's too bad they didn't have a photographer around. Now, that would have been a good picture for a change . . . Dietrich and me."

## 11.

After *The Man Who Knew Too Much* finished its short London location I flew to Rome, back to *War and Peace*, just in time for the arrival of the Ferrers.

As was the case with most of the stars with whom I worked in Europe, I met Audrey Hepburn for the first time at the foot of an airplane ramp. She turned out to be taller than I had im-

agined from the screen and not nearly so frail as she looked, at least to judge by her Joe Louis-like handshake. Audrey walked smilingly into the arms of the Roman press corps that had set up all the welcoming paraphernalia: television, radio, photographers and reporters.

Unlike Ava and also because of her readiness to accept Mel's guidance, she was willing to recognize the dubious qualities peculiar to Rome newsmen and to accept them, even if she did not like nor approve of them. In her case, many were old friends, a large number of newspapermen having appeared with her in *Roman Holiday*.

I, too, had employed reporters and photographers to appear in two sequences of *The Barefoot Contessa*, mob scenes in which they worked no more importantly than as extras, seen chasing Ava in her role of the Spanish screen star when she attended the premiere of her first picture and again when she testified at the murder trial of her father. That the Rome newsmen accepted this kind of work may be a clue to their caliber, their ethics and the bare subsistence salaries they were paid.

It is axiomatic that celebrities may travel the length and breadth of the world receiving normal if sometimes overly enthusiastic press coverage but at least a degree of fair and honest reporting. This is not true in Italy, where a sensation-hungry press repeatedly fabricates stories out of whole cloth and succeeds in having them presented to the world as correct. Thus is there a constant victimizing of those most innocent of all Roman pilgrims, Hollywood stars, from Ingrid Bergman right down a whole list of favorites: Humphrey Bogart, Robert Taylor, Anita Eckberg, Linda Christian. And, of course, like Abu Ben Adam, at the head of the list is Ava Gardner.

I can remember an early evening during the hot summer after a day's work on *The Naked Maja* when Ava and I had stopped at a little *trattoria* around the corner from her Piazza di Spagna apartment for a short beer. We couldn't have stayed longer than half an hour but when we left the establishment we were met

by two arrogant young photographers who persisted in snapping away at us as we walked the two short blocks to Ava's apartment building.

As a former newsman I couldn't imagine what they could possibly do with the pictures, because it was a part of Ava's daily routine at that time to be with me. Nevertheless a month or so later I saw the story they had invented—two full pages of pictures—in which my identity as Ava's manager was deliberately withheld, the inference being that she had been found walking along Via Veneto with a strange man, looking sad and tired. The caption of the magazine layout concluded bitingly: "She was beautiful once."

How can things like this happen?

There are many reasons, none good or reflecting credit on Roman press standards, neither Italian, American nor English. In Rome almost anyone possessing a camera automatically becomes a press photographer, and dozens of such amateurs lurk around the areas frequented by celebrities, especially the Via Veneto, Rome's Broadway. Since all Italian weeklies, London papers, American wire services, etc., are in the market for news pictures, the amateur constantly hopes that he will stumble on something sensational.

Furthermore, in the last decade Rome has attracted celebrities who have given it color and importance in world news. In a way the city recalls Hollywood in the 1920's when movie stars reigned extravagantly in their lovely climate. Because Rome's sunny weather approximates that of Southern California it was only natural that some of the film colony, the displaced persons of the movie world, gravitated there, finding in it a continuation of their lives at home as they took over sumptuous modern Parioli apartments and terraced *palazzos* along the Via Appia. This group included some of the Fifth Amendment boys, as well as actors like Errol Flynn and Orson Welles who found great financial advantages in establishing residence abroad, starlets who hadn't quite made the grade in more keenly com-

petitive Hollywood, and mainly the drifters, those who would never achieve the American dream of fame and fortune under any circumstances. For them Rome served as a sort of tranquilizer. And these were by far the most numerous.

Audrey and Mel were fair bait for the Rome press corps when they arrived, but by choosing to face the problem directly they succeeded in throwing off some of the snide insinuations then circulating. With rare directness Audrey took me right into her confidence, telling me point-blank that Mel was not her Svengali, that the double Broadway curtain calls stemmed from her insistence because she felt Mel, as a better-known New York player, deserved them; further, if I were asked, I should say she was happily married and proposed staying that way for some time.

No two stars found more ways to keep themselves occupied than Mel and Audrey. They had their fingers in every pie of the production: the script which was now being worked over by director Vidor (Irwin Shaw had returned to his home in the Pyrenees warning that his name should not be used in the publicity), the casting, the publicity, the costume designing. Nothing escaped their eagle eyes and their influence accounted, in no small part, for the gross miscasting of that fine actor Henry Fonda in the part of Pierre.

As an assignment, the film was more War than Peace. There was no budget for publicity and, despite my pleas, none forthcoming. My letters and stories were filed away in the office boy's desk instead of the mailbox because there was no postage to send them.

All parties involved—Audrey, Mel, Paramount, De Laurentiis, odds and ends of press agents representing the various headliners, and the Roman press—expected much more from a big production than an impoverished one-man publicity department could deliver. Margaret Truman, for instance, came to Rome and asked to visit the set. She was traveling with Syng-

man Rhee's daughter. I could hardly transport such famous young ladies to Cinecitta in my tiny Fiat 500, but it required a whole day of wrangling with De Laurentiis to obtain permission to rent a decent car, even though the picture we snapped of Margaret with Henry Fonda played around the world.

In comparison to this job, my gypsy life on the road with Ava had been a delight. I began to muse about the possibility of getting to Madrid and having the birthday flamenco—anything to get out of Rome and away from *War and Peace* for a time. Not knowing where Ava was staying—if indeed she was in Madrid at the time—I impulsively wired Beatrice in Hollywood to remind Ava of the flamenco date and to ask her to telephone me.

Weeks went by without an answer until one morning at five o'clock the phone rang in my apartment. The outrageous hour told me who it was.

"Where have you been, honey?" Ava said. "I've been trying to reach you for a week."

"Why didn't you call me at the office?" I said.

"Oh! Is that the other number? Well, I guess I have been calling there," she explained, "but it was always early in the morning so today I decided to try this number. Honey, are you coming over?"

"Sure, I'll be there Friday."

"Wire me the plane," she said, "and I'll meet you, and listen, bring some olive oil, spaghetti and *espresso* coffee."

De Laurentiis grudgingly gave me permission to take the weekend off, and it was good to get away. Ava's face smiling at me across the barrier of Barajas Airport in Madrid was the prettiest sight I had seen in weeks. She was staying at the Hilton Hotel and had engaged a room there for me. The flamenco party turned out to be all she had promised. Ava rented a private room in a flamenco café in the old part of Madrid. A few guests, Madrid friends of hers, were invited to the performance which featured Faico, an undersized, brilliant, eccentric dancer who sometimes played the chic Hilton night club but who much pre-

fferred the cellars along Madrid's Gran Vía where native audiences were more responsive to him than tourists—and to the fine details of flamenco dancing, especially the necessity for keeping at it until both artist and audience fall down exhausted. Ava's *fiesta* was no exception to tradition, going on and on until the small hours of the morning.

It was good to be relaxed again and good to be with Ava. There was nothing unusual in her life at the time. She didn't know which picture would be her next, probably *The Little Hut*, scheduled for filming in Rome. Her main preoccupation was finding a house in Madrid. She had a few in mind and expected to make a decision shortly. "I need a home badly, I've never really had one," she said. "I hate hotel living but it seems that I've done nothing else lately."

Also staying at the Hilton were Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Kramer, old friends of mine from Hollywood. Stanley was there to start preparations on a big picture, his first spectacle, *The Pride and the Passion*. He asked me if I were free. I explained that I was doing a miserable job and having a miserable time with *War and Peace*, and that if he could make me a firm offer on the spot, I would somehow make myself available. Kramer suggested a deal and I lost no time in wiring Paramount that I had been assured a year's work at a better salary and decent working conditions, that unless they could match Kramer's offer I was submitting my resignation from *War and Peace*, effective in four weeks.

Two weeks went by after my return to *War and Peace* and my telegram remained unanswered. Meantime, Kramer was pressing me into giving him a starting date. The disparity between the jobs was too wide, leaving no alternative but to tell Paramount and De Laurentiis I was definitely through. With no regrets on either side I left the picture.

Ava was still at the Hilton when I made the short hop from Rome to begin work on *The Pride and the Passion*, which had Cary Grant and Frank Sinatra as the male stars. A woman star

needed to be found. There was some small talk of Ava doing the role and she admitted she would have liked it, because the part was short and showy. As far as having qualms about appearing with Sinatra, Ava dismissed them. "Why not? I like him very much and he's a fine actor."

But the possibility of Ava's appearance never went beyond the area of casual conversation. Metro had definitely decided on *The Little Hut* and Ava, beginning the final three years on her contract, was determined not to upset the applecart. As she put it, "I'd play Little Eva if they want—anything to get through this lousy deal fast."

Immediately after my birthday visit to Madrid, Ava had gone at the business of her house in earnest. She selected one at Maraleja, just outside the city, a short ten minutes' drive from the center of town. It was a low, ranch-type home, not unlike the kind film people dote on in California—surrounded by lots of land, with a place for a swimming pool and *cabaña*, which Ava lost no time in installing. Still, compared to the typical film star's home in Bel Air or Rome, it was modest. The property faced low, rolling hills, looking across to a beautiful, tree-fringed horizon.

It was ready in time for a Christmas party and when I read the invitation and saw that the party began at midnight I knew Ava had really settled down to Spanish living. The country's late hours suited her to perfection.

The studio at which the Kramer unit set up its organization was nearby, on the road to the airport near Ava's house, so it was easy for me to pop in and out of Maraleja just as I had at Corso d'Italia.

Kramer eventually signed Sophia Loren for the role of the gypsy girl in his pageant of the 1812 Spanish War of Independence, and I made a number of visits to Rome for photography, TV, and radio sessions, and also to arrange for Sophia's trip to Madrid for tests, conferences with Kramer and press receptions.

Sophia was a lovely woman—young, eager, enthusiastic, and co-operative. This was her first picture in English with an American producer and she was anxious to capitalize on it to the fullest. Her career then was being guided by Carlo Ponti, a knowledgeable Italian motion picture producer, who is now married to her.

The Spanish press immediately warmed to the Italian beauty and her pre-production trips to Madrid and Barcelona became personal triumphs. She even flew to Barcelona, breaking a promise never to use air transport after once having missed a plane that came down, killing twelve girls who, like herself, were beauty contest candidates. Sophia did exactly as she was told and I was delighted to find her so co-operative.

The publicity program for *The Pride and the Passion* was enormous, the most extensive and expensive ever attempted by an American company filming in Europe. The publicity department counted some seventeen members, a caravan of automobiles, three photographers, even our own still film laboratory. The highlights of the schedule were visits to Madrid by newspapermen from all over Europe, England and the United States. More than one hundred journalists were invited to see the picture in the making during its hundred-odd days of shooting. Knowing that every one of them would also want a story on Ava during their Madrid excursion, I sent a list of their arrival dates to her with accompanying note: *These are the days for you to get lost.*

Midway in our preparations, Ava left for Rome and *The Little Hut*. One of the members of the cast turned out to be her friend from *Contessa* days, Walter Chiari. I had not heard about Walter since then nor had Ava ever mentioned him. From the papers, though, I knew Ava was being seen constantly in his company and seemed pleased and happy with the friendship. That was good news.

Cary Grant and Sophia arrived in Madrid well in advance of the start of production. Frank Sinatra was due in at the last

possible moment, no more than a day or two before he was to go before the cameras. With *The Little Hut* shooting on a short schedule, I figured that meant Ava would be back in Madrid at around the same time. Actually Ava arrived back shortly before Sinatra, almost within days, having finished *The Little Hut*, and then flown to the Riviera for Grace Kelly's wedding to Prince Rainier—the only Hollywood celebrity who accepted Grace's invitation. All the others found reasons to beg off, the principal one being, as one star told me cynically, "Why go to anything where you're not the star—and who can take the spotlight away from a bride?"

I happened to be at the airport on another errand when Ava arrived, hobbling in the new pair of shoes she had worn to the wedding. "You couldn't get out of there. It was a shambles. Every plane was filled up. I was lucky. But to make connections I had to go straight from the wedding to the airport. I didn't have time to change these damn shoes. They're killing me."

The wedding, as Ava described it, was simply beautiful and Grace stunning. "How I envy her," she said, "to be so beautiful, have a lovely husband and to be so loved and admired. She's a lucky girl."

Of *The Little Hut* she had little to say. "I hated it, that's all. Every minute of it. It was a lousy story. I shouldn't have done it. The director was awful. It's not going to be much but what could I do? If I took another suspension they would keep me at Metro the rest of my life."

Frank Sinatra's entrance into Madrid was preceded by a telephone call to Kramer warning that if so much as one newspaperman showed up at the airport he would take the next plane back. That was a fine curve to hand me but the edict fortunately came early enough to make an all-out effort possible. The Madrid press corps was far smaller than the Roman, the American wire services overworked and understaffed. They would perhaps resent not having been notified of Sinatra's coming but, with luck, they might not be tipped off by an outside source beforehand.

On the day Sinatra was due, I quietly closed down the publicity office, leaving no one there to answer the telephone. His plane was expected in the middle of the Spanish siesta period and that was a break for me. Only a couple of members of the company were there to meet him when he arrived accompanied by an entourage, including Hank Sanicola, one of his long-time cronies and a sort of personal manager. Sinatra agreed to pictures by our own company photographer as a girl in his party, Peggy Connolly, slipped quietly out of camera range. He then sped into Madrid to his suite at the Hilton and the first things he ordered were a piano and a convertible. He didn't like the Mercedes-Benz sedan the company had provided.

The next morning when I reached the office I found the front pages of the Madrid newspapers splashed from cover to cover with pictures of Sinatra at a big movie ball given the night before. There he was, smiling broadly with Peggy Connolly, any number of Spanish screen stars, and being photographed with Madrid's café society. It was an odd event for someone to attend on his first night in Madrid after insisting he wanted to see no press.

Kramer never for an instant deluded himself that he was going to have an easy time in Spain with Sinatra, but from the moment he set on the C. S. Forester story, *The Gun*, as a project, he saw only Sinatra in the role of the Spanish patriot who leads a ragged force of partisans across Spain carrying a huge cannon to be fired on the walls of Avila, behind which Napoleon's forces have been shooting Spaniards at the rate of six and seven a day. Kramer had dared to brave Sinatra's stormy disposition the first time he ever went to bat as a director, with *Not As A Stranger*. The quip made the rounds at the end of the picture that Kramer had sworn he would never have Sinatra in one of his films again, if he were forced to go begging on ~~the street~~ with a tin cup.

Sinatra was quiet and friendly during the first few weeks of *The Pride and the Passion*. Being in Madrid which has a servile

press, the chief function of which is glorifying the Franco regime, Sinatra was not pursued by reporters or photographers, and there was no such thing as setting newshounds on Ava's house to see whether he visited her or not.

Sinatra did meet Ava several times at her home and at the apartments of mutual friends, but there was no doubt that their estrangement was final, even though they were still married. There were no attempts at a reconciliation and they were never seen together in public. Back home, the columns buzzed that Sinatra had brought Peggy Connolly along to make sure his old torch for Ava would not blaze up again. It could have been true although Peggy left weeks before Sinatra.

The visiting reporters all bombarded me with inquiries about Ava, even in the face of my repeated assertions that I had nothing more to do with her publicity. If they wanted to see Ava, I suggested that any taxi driver could take them to her home. She had no telephone and undoubtedly would not answer a letter or telegram. A few intrepid souls did brave their way to Ava's doorstep and she received them willingly and charmingly, much to their surprise and mine.

Midstream in the shooting schedule, columnist Louis Sobol printed a front-page story in the Hearst papers that Sinatra had walked off *The Pride and the Passion*. We succeeded in persuading Sobol to make a retraction. But meantime Sinatra decided I was responsible for the bad publicity and he wanted my head. He demanded that Kramer throw me off the picture.

Kramer refused but asked me to keep out of Sinatra's way. That was easy to do and something of a relief. "He planted that story himself," asserted Kramer. "He's been beefing about the schedule to anyone who would listen. He wants me to change it, and I'm afraid I'm going to have to."

The Sobol story had indeed been 90 per cent true, generated by Sinatra's indignation over his belief that he was being held on the picture too long. He had spoken about it openly in front

of magazine and newspapermen who were only too happy to pass such a juicy item along to columnist Sobol.

*The Pride and the Passion* was a big movie whose locations ranged from Avila and Escorial to a week in northern Spain, its mountains, village squares and bull rings. Every bit of the picture involved exterior shooting. Huge numbers of people were required in the various sequences. The whole populace of Avila, for instance, was utilized in a scene showing the collapse of the city's wall. Foot soldiers and cavalry had been borrowed from the Spanish Army for enormous scenes to portray the defeated, bedraggled Spanish soldiers retracing before Napoleon's hordes. They naturally were available to Kramer only at particular times. Thus it was difficult, if not impossible, to schedule the picture along the usual lines of getting the stars, especially one as expensive, and explosive, as Sinatra, in and out quickly.

Sinatra, brooding over what he regarded as an untenable situation, finally served an ultimatum that he expected to be finished on a particular date. Kramer could rightfully have fought Sinatra's demands but chose not to. The stakes were too great. If Sinatra impetuously walked out of the big picture, Kramer might, of course, have recourse to legal action but meantime the company would be compelled to close down and the financial loss would be staggering. The production of a film as big as *The Pride and the Passion* costs \$10,000 a day. So the production department went to work and revamped the schedule completely. True to his word, Sinatra left exactly when he said he would. There were no newspapermen at the airport to say good-by—nor was there anyone from *The Pride and the Passion*.

Ava too must have heaved a sigh of relief, for she began to appear around Madrid again, dining out at the same places as the company, and we saw quite a lot of her again. Sinatra's leaving lifted a weight from the company. Cary Grant took over the custody of Sinatra's convertible. Tensions eased and the production sped through its final weeks. Before the big end-of-the-

picture party that Kramer always gives, Sophia left for Rome. A few nights earlier, however, she attended a little farewell party tossed by the publicity department.

Sometime in the middle of the evening, I turned around and looked for Sophia. "Where is she?" I asked one of my assistants who had also come to know Ava very well.

"She's gone. She left about fifteen minutes ago."

"Funny, I didn't notice it," I said.

"She just slipped out quietly," he explained. "Do you know something? If it had been Ava and she'd tried to slip away, everybody would have noticed it."

He was so right and I have never forgotten the observation. Again I found myself contrasting the other stars I knew with Ava. No doubt, Sophia was the easiest to work with. But even that didn't make me feel as interested in her as in Ava.

A whole year had passed since I first came to Madrid and there was another birthday to face. "No flamencos, Ava," I told her. "I've entertained one hundred newspapermen and I've had it, all the food, all the drinks and all the entertainment I can handle. I'll just pop over to your house for a drink—early, very early—American cocktail time not Spanish.

When, about five that afternoon I drove to Maraleja, no one was there. The servants, however, let me in and I waited a bit, mixed myself a drink and wrote Ava a note saying that, like Kilroy, I'd been there.

I went back to my apartment unconcerned because in a telephoneless life, such things were bound to happen. Eventually they always straighten themselves out. I was fairly certain Ava would show up and she did, at my apartment, about ten or eleven in the evening. "Honey, I'm sorry. I just plain forgot, just now I was driving home and saw your light in the window. ~~There's~~ Walter— You know him from Rome, don't you? He flew in today and I went to the airport to pick him up. Then we got all mixed up with dinner."

Walter sat down, took a drink I offered him and started rat-

ting away in English. "Holy cow! You've certainly learned to talk," I exclaimed. "The last time I saw you, you didn't know a word of English. You must have been studying."

He beamed his pleasure that I had admired his skill with the language. "I haven't opened a book. Ava taught me during the picture."

They didn't stay long and I turned to my packing, since I was leaving the next day for New York.

## 12.

An assignment in Rome and in the middle of the Libyan Desert for a John Wayne picture, *Legend of the Lost*, brought me back to Europe a few months later, repeating what had become a familiar work pattern: making the rounds first in New York, then London and Paris before going to my usual headquarters in Rome.

I wasn't in the Eternal City more than a few hours when I learned Ava was there and telephoned. She was living in the Parioli district, an unlikely spot for her, but Rome being a place where accommodations are always difficult to find, I imagined she was doing the best she could.

Having been on the run myself, I had heard little news since Madrid. I knew Ava's next picture would probably be *The Sun Also Rises*, on still another loan-out from Metro, this time to Darryl Zanuck, who was producing the Ernest Hemingway story independently for 20th Century-Fox. A second unit had been in Spain during the days of *The Pride and the Passion* to shoot the running of the bulls at Pamplona.

I hopped into a cab and Beatrice welcomed me in a small apartment which, she explained, belonged to a friend. When

Ava emerged from her dressing room I took one look and gasped. She was wildly blonde. What's more she had put on a little weight, which was rare for her. But when it happened, it showed in Ava's face, giving her a round, wide-eyed look that didn't belong to her personality. I wanted to be fresh and wise-crack that she looked like a chubby albino but held my tongue. Instead I said she looked fine and asked if the new hair color was for the picture.

"No, I felt like being a blonde, so I changed it just a couple of weeks ago." She produced her martinis and we gossiped away about what she'd been up to. In the main, I gathered she had been gadding around with Walter and getting her wardrobe for *The Sun Also Rises*. Walter was going to open in a revue in Milan shortly and she expected to accompany him.

We decided on the Piccolo Budapest for dinner. As we reached the lobby, Ava asked me to go outside and case the street. "They're driving me crazy. There are photographers everywhere. They're trying to get pictures of me as a blonde." There wasn't a photographer in sight so we slipped into her waiting car, driven as always by Mario.

Near the end of our quiet dinner, I looked up to spot Walter entering the restaurant and heading for our table. Ava didn't seem too happy about his arrival as he slipped into the seat next to her. She greeted him indifferently, then lapsed into a silence while Walter and I exchanged small talk.

After dinner Ava decided she wanted to hear a new combo at one of the jazz joints and off we went, first inspecting the alley outside the restaurant to check on photographers. This was the first time I had seen Ava so concerned about photographers, although I surely was aware she had no great love for them.

I stayed at the jazz joint about an hour and left, pleading a tough schedule of work involved in setting up the publicity operation. Ava and Walter went on to Milan and I burrowed into work, thinking no more about the evening until a week or so later an Italian illustrated appeared with a series of pictures

showing Walter, Mario and Ava playing hide and seek with a cameraman. It was a most unflattering group of pictures and I could only conclude that Ava was right. She had been chased by the photographers and they eventually caught up with her that evening.

This, unhappily, was not a lonely, isolated foray between Ava and the Italian press but the forerunner of many more. Once during this engagement in Rome I heard from Ava, early one morning, a long-distance call from Milan asking me to come up for the weekend. I did my best to manage the invitation but we were close to the start of production in Libya and I was scheduled to fly there for desert locations, sprawled out in all directions from an oasis village called Ghadames right on the border of Libya, Tunisia and Algeria. The only way to reach it comfortably was by private plane. The alternative was a twenty-four-hour trip by Land Rover from Tripoli. Rosanno Brazzi actually braved it this way but John Wayne and Sophia Loren, the feminine star, flew in. I made the trip with a cargo of chickens who cackled their way frantically to Ghadames, suffering from air sickness.

Ghadames was a fascinating outpost and when I saw it first, I laughed that this was one place Ava certainly could make a picture without worrying about spying photographers. The Arab population had no cameras nor even a clue as to what a motion picture was. I naïvely had carried mimeographed publicity copy for distribution to local papers. Of course, there were none and, as a matter of fact, only the children could read. To both the adults and children of Ghadames, movie making was a mysterious activity in which a strange trio—Wayne, Sophia and Brazzi—did crazy things in front of a big black box.

This was the land of the Taurogs and a great deal of preliminary negotiations had gone on to obtain consent for them to appear in the picture, which depended for its atmosphere and color on many scenes of the veiled Arab tribe galloping swiftly across the sands on their camels. Somehow, the Taurogs held fewer

reservations about the movie than the still camera, probably because they were farther away from the former. Although I managed to get one publicity setup with Sophia I couldn't hold the Taurogs long enough to do the same with John Wayne. Their leader protested that the men had become nervous. This picture taking was against their religion and they were going back to camp. They turned on their camels and left.

Wayne fumed when he heard this. "Well they take our money, don't they?"

The Taurogs not only took his money but struck for a raise when the truth dawned on them how far the foreigners had traveled to photograph them and their land. The picture could, of course, have conjured synthetic Taurogs on any Arizona desert but not the fleet-footed Arabian camels. A camel, I discovered, was the key to a neat enlistment in the French Foreign Legion's elite Camel Corps. Buy yourself a camel and you can join and stay in it as long as the camel holds out. Then you can leave when either you or the camel gets tired. There are no formalities.

I had made a good friend of the head of the town; whom I called the "Mayor." Thanks to the years that Ghadames had been an important French Foreign Legion post, he spoke good French. As a matter of fact the Legion had removed only a few weeks before our arrival, but in spite of this token gesture to the plan for Libyan independence, they had not strayed very far across the border. Ghadames, although unofficially, was still under their patrol

Flushed by the amount of money that had been poured into their village of the thousand palm trees that stored the water supply and produced the half-beams that held up the mud huts of Ghadames, the Arabs decided to hold a dance. It was a moonlight night and evidently they had come from miles around, having heard by ways known only to them that it was going to take place. The Mayor asked me to accompany him late that night and led me through a labyrinth of tiny streets, a part of

Ghadames I had never seen. We stopped at the house of a man who was a friend of the Mayor. It consisted of a single room with a tattered carpet on the floor. We found seats on the rug and I drank the traditional three cups of sweet herb tea which I had seen our Arab workers brewing constantly through the day.

From there, the Mayor led me to a frontless building, evidently the town recreation hall. It was illuminated by a single electric bulb. There were no Arab women present—only men, most of them veiled. A semicircle had been formed around an orchestra composed of three Arabs and a Negro woman wearing a ring in her nose, who chanted away as they plucked on primitive instruments. One by one the men arose and began to dance, beating out the monotonous simple steps, weaving and swaying back and forth, continuing until they could dance no more, finally retiring voluntarily or falling down in a comatose state.

The crew, American, Italians and English, were quartered in tattered tents that had long since outlived their usefulness, acquired by Wayne's company from Army Surplus and shipped over to Libya. The production apparently was unaware that the best camping equipment in the world is available in Europe and the renting of tents and camping gadgets, at a fraction of a dollar a day, is a booming business.

On leaving Ghadames after the location I hitched a ride on a plane carrying some officials from Tripoli to a French oil camp. We landed on the desert on a runway marked off by oilcans in the middle of nowhere; a jeep came speeding toward us, also out of nowhere. A few minutes later I was standing in a big, airy, immaculate dining tent, around a bar being offered by uniformed Arab waiters my choice of whiskeys, the best French cognac, gin and tonic. I sat down to dinner and polished off *pâté*, *hasen-pfeffer*, delicious roast chicken and Baked Alaska, each course accompanied by the proper wine. Then came the fruit, cheese, and cognac and espresso.

I complimented the round, smiling French chef on the superb cuisine and expressed my astonishment that such fine chicken could be canned. "Is it a French product?"

The smile faded from his face, "Oh! No, monsieur! Regardez!" He pointed across the sand and when I followed his finger I saw the unmistakable wiring of a large chicken coop.

There they were, my first Libyan friends, the airsick chickens.

*The Legend of the Lost* turned out to be another *War and Peace* where I was concerned. It was the same old story. Handling Ava Gardner was child's play compared to producer-director Henry Hathaway and John Wayne. The "Duke" would scrutinize every photograph of himself and shake his head sadly. "Damn! Damn! That turkey neck! If I were only twenty years younger."

When a picture pleased him he would exclaim, "Man, that's good. That's tough! That's real tough! Print that one."

I was fired from *Legend of the Lost* by one of the "Duke's" associates, singing "Hallelujah!" and determined that neither the wild horses of metaphor nor money would ever lure me back into doing publicity in Europe. I promised myself I would never make another hotel reservation, never pick up a star at an airport, never count luggage and certainly never go over a set of stills with aging actors as long as I lived.

All these firm resolutions were made without my knowing the one man in show business who, having cajoled forty international stars into appearing in tiny parts in one motion picture, would certainly have no trouble in hiring me—Mike Todd.

Todd, as he put it, "auditioned" me in his New York office where, after he sent for me, I waited some three hours to see him. Every now and then he would pop his head out the door of his office and say, "Sorry, Hanna, it won't be long. Just sit tight. Have you got anything to read? How about a Coke?"

When I finally sat down and he bobbed up and down to talk business he said, "I hear you're pretty temperamental, hard to

get along with. That's okay, it doesn't bother me. How much do you want?"

I was off to Paris forty-eight hours later to handle the opening of *Around the World in Eighty Days* and to meet Todd and his bride, Elizabeth Taylor, a day or so afterward, when they were due to arrive in Cherbourg. It was Easter when I arrived and a glance at the *Herald-Tribune* told me the bright news that Ava was at the Plaza-Athénée around the corner from my hotel. She had, in the months between, been to Mexico for *The Sun Also Rises* with Henry King as director and Tyrone Power as her co-star. She had also, I read, obtained a Mexican divorce from Sinatra.

Naturally, I beat a path to the hotel reception desk and found a sleepy Ava at the other end of the telephone. "What time is it, honey?" she asked as though I had spoken to her an hour before. I told her it was one or two in the afternoon. "Oh! I'm glad you woke me up. I have to leave for Rome tonight. Tell you what. You come back and meet me in the American Bar downstairs in a couple of hours."

We exchanged our personal news and Ava was immediately curious about Elizabeth Taylor. "Is she really as happy as they say?" she asked. I explained that I didn't know, having met her just briefly in Todd's office, but I assumed she was. Even in those few minutes I could see Todd was devotion itself, stopping our interview every few seconds to call Liz or to shoot one of his lieutenants off to get her something.

"What are you doing in Paris? You always told me you hated it." I asked Ava.

"I just came up to see Walter for a few days. He's been making a picture and we're leaving tonight. I still hate Paris. I'll be glad to get out of this burg."

Ava brushed off *The Sun Also Rises* with typical indifference. "I don't know. I think it got loused up somewhere along the line. But I loved Mexico. It's got a quality all its own. I think I'd like to live there someday." She thought a moment. "Oh

hell, I couldn't live anywhere very long, I don't think. I'd get bored. It's like Madrid. I'm always glad to get back there. It's fun for a few weeks, the flamencos and the bullfights, but after that—well I just have to have a change."

"And how are things with you and Walter?"

"Hell, we're still fighting," she laughed. "You ought to know that."

At that moment Walter arrived and the little party broke up. Ava had some shopping to do before catching the plane that night.

We promised to catch up with each other soon.

Working with Mike Todd was a mad, stimulating and frustrating experience that everyone in show business should have enjoyed—or suffered. Few, though, could have endured it twice. When I met him, Mike was at his most extravagant. His "show," as he persisted in calling *Around the World in Eighty Days*, was itself about to embark on a tour around the world, and for his showcase the onetime carnival entrepreneur chose the giddiest European carnival of them all, the Cannes Film Festival. The "show," having won dozens of accolades including the Academy Award, was disqualified from entering festival competition which admitted only exclusive entries. The "show" performed instead as a super-deluxe opening attraction for the festival, followed by an *Around the World in Eighty Days* party for which Mike took over the Casino at Nice.

Mike flew to the South of France from Cherbourg in a private plane with Mrs. Todd (as everyone was warned to call Liz Taylor), after a long session with the press that Liz withstood with amazing charm and patience. She certainly was a beautiful young woman but within seconds of our meeting I had begun to compare her with Ava. I later came to find they shared many characteristics, having, of course, attended the same finishing school—Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Like Ava, Liz spent a great deal of time and care with her make-up. She knew all the

Metro tricks of making a striking personal appearance and could enter a room with her own confident air, but not nearly as regally as Ava. Both shared the same earthy metaphor. But Liz lacked the intangible that can only be described as Gardner magic.

Mike's language was another thing—a staccato series of words all pronounced clearly enough, but which, when strung together, made no sense at all, at least to me. I prided myself on getting along fairly well in French, Italian and German, but Todd-talk defeated me completely. Oddly, because of his unwillingness to hire a French secretary, I was obliged to do more translating for him than any of the people I worked for. My French was just as mysterious to Mike as his Todd-talk, enabling me to produce the gimmick he needed to make his lavish party a success. Typically Todd had embarked on it with no preparation and in the absence of time—we were within hours of opening—he still lacked any kind of a flash attraction, the kind of Todd-like stunt that would be talked about.

The Casino director had told me a small circus was playing not far from Nice featuring an excellent lion act that could be hired for the night. When I translated this to Todd he looked at me disgustedly. "Lions! You dope, they smell! They'd stink up the room. You should know that! I'm surprised!"

"Yes, I do know that," I snapped back. "But you could play them outside the Casino, set up cages by the big windows and throw the floodlights on them."

Mike loathed anyone to have another idea, especially an old one. The Casino director, in telling me about the lions, had explained that this was how he had played the lion act once before. Naturally I left that part of the story out of my translation, knowing Mike Todd would never consent to being an imitator. There would be no lions, and we needed them badly.

Grudgingly, Mike gave in and the lions came and conquered, garnered the lion's share of the publicity, along with the diamond tiara Todd had presented to Liz for the occasion. The Cannes Film Festival guests soaked up Mike's champagne,

the lions roared and Liz's tiara sparkled, but the Paris opening of the "show" wasn't even off the ground. The two box offices Mike insisted on installing at the theatre weren't doing anything like the landslide business he expected.

Mike was a man full of show-business homilies, and one of his favorites was, "I never heard of anybody getting poor collecting money." So far so good, but even for Mike Todd there were ground rules about collecting money from cautious European audiences. He had gone to France and violated every one of them. Assuming blandly that Parisians would swallow his Broadway brand of flamboyant showmanship, he had taken a theatre in the wrong part of Paris for a first-run road show. It was a new theatre and the mighty attraction, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, was to be its first bill with all the appropriate hoopla. The trouble was that Mike controlled not only the "show" and the booking, but the hoopla. You couldn't put a picture in the lobby without his consent.

As in New York, Todd insisted on playing only three matinees a week and one performance nightly, in the fashion of the legitimate theatre. He insisted on raising prices higher than any film attraction that had ever played Paris. At a huge expense he installed hard cardboard tickets and a Broadway box-office setup that the French, accustomed to their equally practical but penciled charting of the theatre, could never be expected to understand, much less to like.

All these details were not, of themselves, difficult to accomplish except that they involved official government permission. United Artists had to plead before the price control authorities to obtain the admission raise. I was required to appear before three different boards to alter the texture of the tickets from paper to cardboard and still make them conform to the requirements of the French tax authorities who check theatre receipts every night.

But none of these Todd-like gimmicks affected Parisian habits. One attended the theatre only on nights that did not

interfere with the ritual of the French dinner. Theatregoing is therefore an impromptu affair. Even the biggest Parisian stage hits do not print tickets longer than three weeks in advance and at the Paris Opera it is impossible to reserve seats a month beforehand. Indeed, no one—not even the general director—knows the program that far ahead.

Todd, of course, was aware of all this but stubbornly didn't want to believe it. One thing he didn't count on was that the French film trade papers publish official attendance figures taken from tax reports and not, as at home, from the enthusiastic reports of individual managers. After a week of desultory business not even Todd could bluff himself into believing that *Around the World in Eighty Days* was the hit it had been in the States.

Those who saw it loved it, especially children. Todd eventually became convinced he could not "sell" the French school system into altering their traditional school holiday from Thursday to the American Saturday. He installed Thursday afternoon shows for youngsters. Eventually this and other modifications in Todd's presentation were made and the quieter, more lackadaisical French system restored. *Around the World in Eighty Days* began to fare a little better.

Mike sent the original balloon over to me for an ascension from the Place des Invalides and I reveled in the quick course in ballooning I had to take, the fun of getting all the permissions, and finally the excitement of seeing it going up on a clear, cloudless day before some 25,000 spectators, all carrying *Around the World in Eighty Days* toy balloons. But the roughest part of the Todd job was persuading airplane captains, both those of private and regular carriers, to hold up their departures for the ever-late honeymooning couple. "We don't live like ordinary people," Mike once said in an interview. It was characteristically honest as well as the understatement of the year. After finishing my stint with him I was grateful for an ordinary rest.

I spent part of it in Munich, Vienna, London and Paris, and

in traveling through areas of the Middle East that I had not seen before.

In Munich, listening to the radio one day, I heard a new report that Ava Gardner had flown furtively into London, arriving at the airport with her head cloaked in a scarf and wearing dark glasses. I read no further and assumed she was having ear trouble which I knew she suffered occasionally. I wrote her a letter to Madrid saying I was sorry to hear she was not well and that I would see her shortly.

Within a week there came a telegram from Ava asking me to buy a therapeutical apparatus that I would find in Munich, known as a *Gesicht Sauna*. Translated, this means face bath and is exactly what the forthright name implies—an apparatus for facial massage with steam and vapors.

I found the *Gesicht Sauna* within hours and shipped it to Madrid by fast express. Beatrice wrote back that Ava was delighted at having it so quickly, but I still had no idea what it was for, believing it to be just a new beauty gadget Ava had heard about.

Stanley Kramer was in Paris when I passed through there en route to Lebanon and he told me his next project was to be *On the Beach*. "I'd like Ava for it," he said, "but she's so tied up with Metro. I don't think I can get near her."

"When do you plan it?" I asked.

"Next year some time. I don't know yet."

Ava had been counting the years, months and days remaining on her contract so long that I was able to tell Kramer authoritatively that her contract would expire at the end of 1958. He seemed surprised that it was so near. "Well, you can't get that kind of information in Hollywood. No one knows anything and for all an independent like myself can discover, Metro has her for the rest of the century."

He thought for a moment. "Could you get the book to her?"

"I don't see why not," I answered. "I may go to Madrid for Christmas but, in the meantime, I'll send it to her. I know I won't

get an answer. She never writes. But I'll catch up with her somewhere. I always do. Leave it to me."

Kramer and I made a date to meet again in Munich after his trip through Scandinavia.

## 13.

I bought two copies of *On the Beach* and sent one to Ava with a letter explaining that Kramer owned the property and had had her in mind for the role of the Australian girl who has one genuine fling at happiness before being caught up in the end of the world.

As I read it I could see a man like Stanley Kramer making a stupendous picture of the Nevil Shute novel. I visualized an opportunity for Ava to play in a really important film for a change, doing a part that might have been written for her. Kramer would give the piece a meticulous production; he would work hard at selling it. He was the kind of producer and director Ava needed, especially if, as she was determined to do, she became a free-lance artist. With a contract, a personality's box-office pull is not scrutinized nearly so closely as that of a free-lance star. If she wanted big money, as most certainly Ava did, she would stand her best chances in doing important pictures and really buckling down to the requirements of managing a career. *On the Beach* was just the transition picture she needed.

As agreed I met Kramer a couple of weeks later in Munich. We talked at length, particularly in reference to the part of the girl and how it might be framed to suit Ava. He was definitely sold on her.

"All I want to know is how to approach Ava without getting involved with Metro and a hundred and one agents," Kramer

said. I assured him I would get some kind of direct answer from Ava.

All Europe was banked in fog when I flew from Munich to Madrid to spend Christmas with Ava. Madrid was no different from the rest of the continent, being dark, gloomy and wet. The weather, however, hadn't dampened the Christmas spirit at Maraleja. Beatrice had arrived some weeks before, bearing gifts like the Magis, the kind Americans appreciate most when they are away from home—all the trimmings needed for a typical old-fashioned American Christmas dinner. With her came the ingredients for Ava's two cakes to celebrate her birthday on the 24th and Christmas Day, marshmallows for the icing, Southern corn liquor instead of brandy for Yuletide hard sauce, a huge turkey, an assortment of hams and, for Ava's in-between snacks, a dozen T-bone steaks. A brightly decorated Christmas tree stood in the corner of the living room and the fireplace burned merrily and constantly.

When I arrived Ava was busy wrapping three or four dozen pairs of shoes which Beatrice had also carried with her from New York, gifts for the boys and girls at a nearby school. When she finished the job, she joined me in the living room. The first thing I inquired about was her trip to London. "Was it your ears?" I asked.

"Honey, don't you know? Look at me."

I looked but could see nothing different about her. She was always at her most ravishing when fussing around the house doing simple things, without make-up and dressed in a robe.

I shook my head.

"Don't you see anything wrong?" she said in astonishment.

Before I could answer, she took my hand and held it to her right cheek. "Feel this." I touched the cheek and felt a small, hard lump. "What's that?" thinking immediately of any number of dreaded diseases.

"A hematoma—a blood clot."

"How on earth did you get it?"

"Falling off a horse."

"But how?" I asked, well aware that Ava couldn't ride. "What in heaven's name were you doing on a horse?"

"That's what I'd like to know now," and she shook her head wearily.

Then Ava told me what happened, how with Walter and a group of friends she had gone to visit the ranch of a famous bull breeder, Angelo Peralta. In the small ranch arena there was going to be an exhibition of *toreo a caballo*, bullfighting on horseback.

Others in the group of *aficionados* tried their hand at the sport. Even if they had not had experience at jousting with a bull they were, at least, experienced horsemen. They taunted Ava, who had never been on a horse in her life, to the point that she felt compelled to mount the horse and take the dare.

"Didn't someone try to stop you?"

"No they didn't, although I probably wouldn't have listened. I was so frightened! And you know taking advice isn't exactly my hobby."

"You should have been slapped off the horse," I retorted angrily.

But she wasn't and it was just a matter of seconds before Ava hit the dirt as, of all things, a still camera ground away. Ava reached into a nearby drawer and pulled out a series of pictures, neatly taped together in an action series, showing every detail of the incident.

"Haven't you seen these?" she asked.

I shook my head.

"They've been published all over the world, in all the magazines, and you should read what they're saying about me in Hollywood—that I'm deformed, that I'll never be in front of a camera again."

As I pieced together the whole story, I realized that Ava's fall had not been taken seriously at first. When she saw her face be-

gin to swell, Ava became terrified. Someone gave her an ice pack. But the party went on, and Ava even danced the flamenco. Finally, in response to her pleadings as the swelling and the discoloration increased, she was driven to Madrid. She knew something was terribly wrong but almost twenty-four hours passed before she was able to get in touch with the late Sir Archibald McIndoe, the famous plastic surgeon in London. Still more precious hours elapsed before she was aboard a plane to London, praying and worrying every mile of the way that she would not—just this once—be subjected to photographers on her arrival. Miraculously her prayer was answered.

Sir Archibald explained what had happened. Ava had suffered a hematoma; a blood clot had formed on the inside of her cheek. Had she suffered a cut it would have been better. Although that might have left a scar, eventually it would have been hardly visible and meantime it could have been camouflaged with make-up.

Prize fighters are often victims of hematomas and surgeons have developed great skill in injecting them to reduce the swelling. Sir Archibald, however, warned Ava. "Leave it alone. Promise me no one will touch it. It will go down of its own accord, but that will take time."

Ava, only somewhat reassured, returned to Madrid and I could readily visualize the tortured days that must have followed. She was not one to wait on time, and the sight of the bruise staring her in the face every hour of the day must have created a terribly despondent mood. As she recounted the details of the accident I could see the evidences of her dismay. She constantly put her hand to her cheek and rubbed the little spot anxiously, as though the act of itself would help reduce it.

A few weeks after the consultation with Sir Archibald, at the prodding of Beatrice who thought another dianosis might ease her tensions, Ava flew to New York to consult another world-famous surgeon. He went over her face carefully and said he

believed he could reduce the hematoma by the injection Sir Archibald had warned her against. Ava asked for time to think it over. She immediately telephoned Sir Archibald in London who repeated his warning: "Ava, don't let anyone touch it, please."

She followed this advice and returned to Madrid, remaining there in seclusion. A Viennese woman who had been giving her facial massages had recommended the *Gesicht Sauna* and that explained the urgent telegram I had received in Munich.

However mutilated her cheek may have looked right after the accident, it had certainly improved tremendously. That Ava had to point the bump out to me proved this. Naturally, then, I began studying her face more closely and it required no degree in medicine to realize that anxiety, as much as the clot itself, had materially impeded her recovery. Once or twice I saw her eyes twitch, and that wasn't very reassuring.

"Thank God, this picture I'm supposed to do is having all kinds of script trouble," she said. "All I'd need now is to request a postponement because of my face and the newspapers would crucify me."

I knew it was useless to tell Ava that for a change some frankness on her part would do considerably less harm than hiding out and being evasive about her condition. Even President Eisenhower wasn't afraid to tell the world about his several illnesses. But any effort to point this out to Ava would have been useless. I knew she was firmly convinced she had none but sworn enemies among the press, all preoccupied with the single notion of sniping at her. There had always been signs in Ava's make-up that she felt herself victimized and used by the people with whom she came in contact, whether personal friends, professional people or the commercial firms she did business with. She noted wryly that Peralta had sold the pictures of the accident to the magazines and had cleaned up.

That one of the shots showed Walter photographing her was

a reason to call him "that jerk." I had the eerie feeling that Ava's suspiciousness had reached the point where she genuinely believed the two men had arranged the fall in order to take pictures of her.

The picture, Ava explained, ought to be, with luck, the last on her Metro contract. It was a story of Goya which was being produced by an Italian company, Titanus Films, headed by the same Goffredo Lombardo to whom I had formerly introduced Ava.

Titanus, the year before, had made a production with Mario Lanza, Metro's problem star. *Seven Hills of Rome* had done very well in its MGM release in the States. Apparently its success had led to the idea that it might be repeated in almost any kind of story about Goya if Ava were cast as the Duchess of Alba. So the deal was made. The scripts Ava had read had all been rejected by her, and she was waiting for still another version.

"They've thrown out the only good one [by Albert Lewin who had written and directed Ava's *Pandora*] and they threw Lewin out too with a settlement of \$100,000. So where does that leave me?" asked Ava. "I don't know. But it's the same old story—if I take a suspension it means another year at Metro. Here I could be getting half a million dollars a picture like the others. Hell, that's probably what Metro gets for me anyhow."

This was quite true. In the financing of *The Naked Maja*, Ava was valued at \$350,000. Metro tossed in \$150,000 in cash for which it received a sizable interest in the profits of the picture and distribution rights in every European country except Italy. Small wonder that the theatrical weekly *Variety*, in reporting the deal, called Ava "the gold in the financing." Metro couldn't lose no matter how badly *Maja* turned out. Ava, however, was paid only \$90,000 for the film.

I led the conversation to *On the Beach*.

"Funny, you know, I read the book before you sent it to me. It's frightening," Ava said.

"What do you think of yourself in it?"

"I'm not sure. I don't know. It's a good part but the subject—it's so downbeat. Maybe. Well, I don't know. What's the setup?"

I explained that Kramer had asked me to act as a go-between and that I had told him of Ava's availability date which might easily coincide with the finish of her Metro contract. "I know he'll meet your salary, Ava, whatever you ask."

"Well, I want half a million, not a cent less," she said firmly.

"He says he has Gregory Peck for the man so you won't have to carry the picture alone. It would be a fine production. Kramer has dignity and stature in the business. You'll get attention and that's how I think your first free-lance assignment should be—not just any old thing that pays you enough money and will have to ride on your name."

Since these ideas reflected her own, Ava had no argument with my line of thinking. She had always said, "Hell, all I want to do is to make money and run—no percentages, no interests, no deferments, no nothing, just the dough." That she had never carried a picture herself was as much her own decision as that of the various producers to whom she was loaned out. She rejected a lesser-known actor in favor of Tyrone Power to play opposite her in *The Sun Also Rises* to prevent the box-office burden from being hers alone.

"Tell you what," she said, "ask Stanley to send me a script as soon as he has one. You keep in touch with him and with me and we'll see what happens."

We turned to the business of celebrating Christmas and it all came off handsomely. Walter was around. Although I noticed the two seemed inclined to quarrel and bicker, there were no serious incidents and Beatrice's food flowed from the busy kitchen with such generosity that I paid more attention to it than to them.

I stayed a day or two longer. The night before I left I sat beside Ava at her dressing table while trying to make the *Gesicht Sauna* work. A part had broken and I promised to get a replace-

ment in Munich. Ava kept feeling the bump and looking at her face in the mirror. "I'm ruined, just ruined. And why did it have to be this side? Damn! What a fool I was. Damn!"

Stanley Kramer was pleased to hear that having read the book, Ava knew *On the Beach* and wrote me that, of course, he could not expect to press for a commitment until the script was in sufficiently good shape to show her. The screenplay, he said, was being worked on and he believed it would be ready in a month or two.

Shortly after the first of the year, Ava left Madrid for Rome to begin the Goya picture, now called *The Naked Maja*. I read about the elaborate lengths to which she had gone in order to avoid the hordes of photographers that were certain to show up at the Ciampino airport, especially in view of the wild rumors about her so-called disfigurement. Ava's extreme precautions were hardly calculated to diminish them.

She had flown from Madrid to Cannes and had been met there by Mario and his trusty old Cadillac. The Riviera press was either not curious about her arrival or she had succeeded in traveling incognito. This is not easy to do in the air over Europe. You cannot travel under an assumed name because of the frontier and passport regulations. And assuming you have gotten aboard under a reservation made in a different name, the radio operator of the plane, likely as not, will blandly wire the information to his company's press department at the next landing—that is, if you are Ava Gardner.

Ava had been lucky. With Beatrice as her companion she drove the long trip from Nice to Rome, although detesting long automobile rides. Ava moved into the Grand Hotel and began the old, familiar and tiresome business of house hunting. Corso d'Italia, which had served her a second time during *The Little Hut*, was not available and she resisted temptations to take the number of large villas offered her, realizing how uncom-

fortably cold they could be in winter. *The Naked Maja*, being scheduled to start any day, according to the production, would have finished long before the first bud of spring. She settled on an apartment in a building right on the Piazza di Spagna, just as noisy but considerably more beautiful than Corso d'Italia.

But when I reached Rome months later in May, *The Naked Maja* had still not gone before the camera and Ava was chafing at the bit because of the long weeks of delay, all stemming from the inability of a parade of writers to whip the script. With great gusto, Ava recounted some of the versions and particularly the dialogue of one in which the Duchess spoke lines straight out of the Bronx and Goya talked like a fellow from Brooklyn.

The producers, Lombardo and Sylvio Clementelli, had very little command of English and there were few English speaking people in their company. Metro and United Artists, both interested in the financing and distribution of the picture, professed to have no authority over the story and would have been reluctant, as I learned later, to interfere even if Titanus had invited them to help. So far as Metro and United Artists were concerned, *The Naked Maja* was strictly a stepchild production, a hit-and-run affair on which, regardless of its quality, they could not lose their investments.

I found Ava in a curious position for her. Like it or not, she was running the show. Something in the way of a script that would please her had to come up finally, although, if it did not, Ava certainly would not have walked out. Rather, the producers realized that Ava's objections to the various versions were valid and, in the absence of anyone else to lean on with a clue to what a motion picture story in English looked—much less sounded—like, they had turned to her. Against all her usual instincts, Ava was working in the production department.

When I arrived, expecting to do some magazine stories about her, Ava was in a "to hell with it" mood. She was on her way to Madrid that afternoon, having made a wardrobe test in the

morning. "I've been cooped up in this place for months. I've just got to get out, even if it's only for a few days. You stay here in the house and watch over things. I'll be back in a week."

Before I knew it, I had settled into the old routine, counting baggage, going to the airport ahead of Ava and Walter, who was accompanying her, casing for photographers and signaling Mario, parked in a corner of the lot, when to drive up so Ava could sail right into the plane through police and customs. Through the years it seemed as if Ciampino had become a second home to me.

I idled away the week sunning on Ava's terrace and parrying phone calls from Clementelli about when Ava was expected back. There was still no telephone in her Madrid home. Communication with Ava existed only by telegraph or the doubtful chance that one could reach her at the Hilton. When Ava hit Maraleja, I knew from experience, she might just as well be at the end of the earth. It had become easier to get in touch with the moon.

Toward the end of the week Ava telephoned to ask what was going on. I explained that the company wanted her in Rome as soon as possible although they needed another week before they could really expect to start. "I'd like to stay here if I can. See if you can arrange it."

I called Clementelli who, with some misgivings, agreed. There were tests to be done, mainly hair and costumes. Moreover, he wanted conferences about the new version of the script which Ava had taken with her to Madrid.

Nevertheless, he saw my viewpoint that Ava had endured months of the same thing—delays and more delays—and that since the picture was finally at the starting gate it might be wiser to allow Ava this one extra week. She might lose some of the tensions the postponements caused. Clementelli, I discovered then and realized conclusively later, had a rare gift for improvisation. He decided to bring the mountain to Mohammed and go to Madrid himself for the story conferences.

Ava was at the other end of the phone at the Hilton waiting for his answer. When I relayed it, she was happy. "Now," she said, "how soon can you get over here?" She didn't wait for an answer but gave me the departure time of the next plane. "Beatrice and I have been talking over something. We want to see you."

I quickly imagined what Ava had on her mind. She was going to suggest that I work for her. It was a natural development in our relationship, in her own position and her desire to continue living and working in Europe.

Beatrice spent only part of each picture with Ava and her principal preoccupation was setting up the various households. But for the rest, Ava needed a trouble shooter, someone to handle all the hundred and one details of being a movie star—and a lonely one at that—working far away from home. She needed someone to front for her at the studio, for the work done in Hollywood by her agents. A man fitted the job's specification much more realistically than a woman. Ava was beginning to recognize a need that had existed for a long time. Having someone close at hand to represent her interests would become even more necessary when she started free-lancing at the end of the year.

I doubted that, like so many other present-day headliners, Ava would ever set up an independent company. Nevertheless she could use the kind of help I was able to give her: suggestions on scripts, help in framing her contract, representing her directly with the production. Her Hollywood agents had recently taken on people in Rome to do their business. But this would never change the mentalities of the men in Beverly Hills who remained woefully ignorant of film industry conditions in Europe—the meager knowledge they possessed being derived solely from three- or four-day trips during which they saw little beyond their big hotel suites and the *fettucini* at Alfredo's.

On the other hand I knew Ava would place less importance on my professional contributions to her career than what she

would expect me to do for her personally: moving her in and out of cities, handling the servants with whom she was always at odds, and mainly being with her. I knew, from long experience, that "being with Ava" meant a twenty-four-hour day. My doubts were very real but even in the face of them I knew I would accept her proposal.

It was a calculated risk. It could end up well or hopelessly, but that is show business. You gamble every second you're in it and a lucky or unlucky spin of the wheel is not the end of the world. One way or the other, being with Ava would wash me out of publicity. And publicity, unlike Moss Hart's playwriting and begging in India, was not my idea of an honorable profession. I would be grateful to leave it.

Of course, with Ava, you never got down to business until she had knocked you off your feet with Southern hospitality. With Beatrice at her familiar post in the kitchen, hand to the hearth, odds and ends of visitors to be entertained and plans for Clementelli's arrival to be made, we were busy enough. "We'll throw a flamenco for him"—an idea I quickly seconded because it had been a long time since the last one.

Sometime during the following afternoon we got around to business and I worked out a deal to be Ava's side-kick, personal manager, stooge, or whatever identity the job would take. It was a modest financial arrangement decided largely by me, far from adequate to the amount of work to be done and totally disproportionate to the background and experience I was bringing to the job. However, although I had never seen Ava's bank balance, I knew, because of her candor with me, that it was the best she could afford at the time. Moreover, I had begun to recognize one quirk in her and it worried me—Ava's uneasiness about parting with a dollar. It was wholly out of character but it had become part of the European image she was creating—a *grande dame*, the kind of person who preferred to distribute her largess according to her mood.

My first job was to read the new script for *The Naked Maja*.

It was no great shakes—Ava and I agreed on that—but it was far better than any of the others, except Lewin's which could still have been salvaged had an American writer been handy to strip it of its verbosity. But either none was available or Titanus had wearied of putting good money after bad, so the latest version had been written by an Italian, George Prospere, and translated into English.

Hopes had long since faded that the film could be shot in Spain because of the objections to the story posed by the still-influential Alba family. Nevertheless, at that very moment, ostensibly representing a company other than Titanus, a second unit crew was photographing the Goya masterpieces at the Prado in Madrid and at Toledo which would be used in the film.

Clementelli came to Madrid and the flamenco was all that it should be—wet, endless, and fun. Ava brought up a few points of criticism about the script and Clementelli agreed to settle them. He dashed back to Rome expecting Ava there a day or so later.

Aboard the plane Ava patted my hand. "I'm so glad about this. We'll get some loot for you and then maybe you can quit the racket too."



*IV.*       *On the Beach*



*F*HE specter of facing the camera again, after almost a year, haunted Ava as we returned to Rome to prepare for the first day's shooting of *The Naked Maja*.

Her fears had little justification, since she could see from tests and still pictures that time, gradually but surely, was curing the hematonia. On the screen the slight bruise remaining gave the illusion of a tiny dimple which was not exactly unflattering. But having lived with her terrors so long, Ava was neither able nor willing to abandon them overnight. She found reassurance in that Titanus had selected, subject to her approval, the cinematographer for the picture, a brilliant young Italian, Giuseppe Rotunno.

The fact of having been on her own for so long, living and working in foreign lands and finding temporary friends among the people who, like herself, were transients, had taken its toll. The strong streak of suspiciousness Ava always possessed about people had begun to enlarge and I could see it growing every day. Not even Rotunno, the man on whom she would need to lean during the filming, had her complete confidence.

Moreover, she was engaged in one of her periodic spats with Walter and these took the form of the suspicion that he was using their relationship to further his own interests, even that he was in league with the press in a conspiracy to persecute her.

Her attitude was wholly without foundation, since Walter was devotion itself and the miles of air travel he ran up in the years of their friendship, following her from country to country, must have been staggering.

To travel as he did Walter often neglected his own interests and was in constant hot water with his television and film producers when he darted off to see Ava at the slightest hint of free time, frequently staying out of touch for three or four days while shooting was hastily improvised around him. Walter, who was working on a film in Madrid, had made one of his helter-skelter excursions to be in Rome for the start of Ava's picture. The effort, however, didn't seem to please her.

Walter's arrival, her characteristic first-day jitters, her fears about the camera, and certainly the kind of scene chosen for the opening, were not designed to diminish Ava's set of nerves. It was a big set, peopled with extras and including co-star Anthony Franciosa playing Goya and the whole roster of Italian actors who were appearing in the picture, every one a star in his own right and an artist to his finger tips. Gino Cervi, Leah Pado-vani and Amedeo Nazzari. There wasn't one among them who was beneath trying to steal a scene and, what was more, each one knew exactly how to do it. Ava was traveling in fast company, and she was all too aware of it.

The scene called for her to enter a church, admire a group of pictures and meet Goya for the first time. Ava weathered it, never stumbling over a line, and managed, although she had never experienced it before, the difficult trick of picking up cues from actors whose English can vary from difficult-to-understand to impossible-to-understand. The art is to watch their mouths closely and to pounce on your line the minute they stop talking.

Italians have separated the two acting arts, speech and pantomime. Some of the most beautiful girls in Italian pictures have never had their voices heard on the screen. They are chosen to look lovely for the camera while legitimate stage and

radio actors later dub their voices. *Maja*, except for its two American stars and an occasional bit player, was peopled entirely with Italians from whom no better English was required than just getting through the scene. They would all be dubbed later by English and American actors.

As nervous as she was, Ava found it a game, stimulating, something of a challenge.

There hadn't been time for the customary preshooting party so we celebrated it after the day's work was done. On our way out an assistant director handed Ava a slip of paper with the next day's dialogue. This we both laughed off as just a temporary situation until the script got itself mimeographed.

That I would begin a new job with a nervous, worried star was not altogether unexpected, but as always, with Ava, I knew there would be those moments when she'd relax and say, "Let's have some fun." I was able, at the beginning of the picture, to steer "fun" into little cocktail parties at home and dinners which Ava herself liked to cook for her chums.

She had to learn a Spanish film dance for the picture and this pleased her enormously, especially since the dance director was a charming and amusing Spaniard who came to the house frequently to teach her the routine. As with the dance of *Contessa* Ava thrived on meeting this requirement of the role—while loathing all the others, mainly the necessity of getting up early.

I used to say that Ava rightfully belonged in the theatre where the performance began at 8:30 in the evening and the normal way of letting down tensions after a performance was the after-midnight life which suited her personality. When, in their infancy, movies needed sunshine, it was reasonable to expect early calls, but that requirement had long since disappeared. Show business once belonged to the night, but when it crossed the country to Hollywood, show people, under the spell of the wondrous California climate, decided to domesticate themselves. So a flamboyant, gypsy business became just another drudgery in

which people rose at unearthly hours for no other reason beyond getting home to dinner at six-thirty. Instead of drinking champagne out of slippers at midnight supper parties, the movie stars frolicked in the sand and tossed one another into swimming pools. Ava had arrived too late for the golden days.

Explaining her affection for the life that opens at dusk, Ava recalled that even as a child she loathed the daytime, longed for the night to come. "It takes talent to live at night," she often remarked. "Not many people have it."

From our trips I had been made all too aware of Ava's capacities for living at night, but *The Naked Maja* revealed another talent I suspected existed but had never really observed in action—her movie know-how.

After a few days with Ava on the set I discovered I was learning more about film making than I had found out in all my years of reporting on pictures and publicizing them. Titanus, for instance, had never heard of wardrobe stills—nor had I. They are simply shots of the hair, costume and hand props made to protect continuity and prevent movie boners such as the star knocking at the door of an apartment dressed in an evening gown and entering it in a fur coat. When the dozens of assistant directors on the picture failed to order the photographs, Ava simply went ahead and had them taken herself, opening her own file on her dressing table.

Like it or not, Ava was in business—functioning more or less as an associate producer on the *Maja*. And I had become her assistant. There was a huge backlog of correspondence to handle as well as the organizing of relations with her agents and business in Hollywood. Both of them, the William Morris Company, her agent, and Morgan Maree, her business manager, welcomed me aboard the Gardner band wagon like a long-lost brother. It was enough for them to know that Ava finally had someone with her who would answer their letters and telegrams.

With agents Ava was in an odd position, being serviced by

William Morris at no fee. Her commissions, instead, were paid to Famous Artists which held a contract that ran until the expiration of her Metro commitment. This came about because of Ava's dissatisfaction with their representation and the interest of Bert Allenberg of the William Morris office in her career and potential earnings. Allenberg was all too well aware of the kind of money Ava could command when she started freelancing. Weighed against the potential future commissions, it was neither unrealistic nor unprofitable to represent Ava gratis for a couple of years. Such situations are not uncommon in motion picture representation.

The script of *On the Beach* had arrived in Rome and Ava liked it. "I cried all night," she asked me to write to Kramer, "it was so beautiful." She asked me to open negotiations with Kramer although Allenberg was firmly opposed to her making it. As alternatives he had presented a number of proposals, all involving William Morris package deals in which he would add Ava to a list of commissionable commodities, such as script, director, and star. These had become the norm in the film business and explained in part why the agents and lawyers were flourishing. Contracts that once had consisted of a couple of pages now ran as long as one hundred.

None of Allenberg's projects, however, matched the forcefulness or the importance of *On the Beach*. Yet Allenberg persisted in his stand that it was too downbeat and not right for Ava at that point in her career.

Kramer, having been advised of her interest, lost no time in telling Ava that he would come to Rome after attending the Berlin Film Festival where his latest picture, *The Brave One*, was entered.

Kramer had only a couple of days to spend in Rome and Ava set up a dinner. Kramer made the mistake of bringing along some flamenco records as a gift and after dinner the evening turned into a flamenco party, although a very mild one. Ava

danced for hours while on the sidelines Kramer chewed his fingernails. "How do you do business with Ava?" he asked me several times. "I'd like to talk to her. I haven't much time."

"Let it ride until tomorrow," I urged him. "I'll see you in the morning."

The next day I was at Ava's apartment early and waited for her to wake up. I came to tell her that she had behaved rudely, that Kramer had traveled all this way to see her and she should at least have shown him the courtesy of discussing the picture. When Ava was propped up in bed and settled behind her breakfast tray—kidneys, stewed tomatoes, potatoes, toast, butter, marmalade and coffee—she asked me to come in. Before I could open my mouth she started. "What do you do with Kramer? How do you talk to him? Here we spent all evening together and he didn't bring up the picture once."

There were moments like that when I wanted to spank her. All during the evening before, Mrs. Kramer, seated beside me at the dinner table, had been telling me how much Stanley wanted Ava but that she was by no means indispensable, that Ingrid Bergman was very interested in *On the Beach* and could be obtained at a much smaller fee than the \$500,000 William Morris was seeking. Kramer countered with \$400,000 and the usual emoluments that go into a star deal these days—expenses, payments for personnel such as chauffeur, secretary and me. Had Ava heard Mrs. Kramer's remarks I could well imagine her snapping, "Well, let Bergman play it," and then stubbornly closing herself out of the project.

Instead of lecturing Ava, I asked what she wanted to do and told her that everything had been left up in the air, that Kramer was leaving the following day. "Why d-n't you have lunch with him?" I suggested.

She looked at me as though I had suggested she shoot herself. "You know I hate lunch. You do it. You settle it with him. Tell him I accept."

I went over to the Excelsior, found Kramer and gave him the

news. He was pleased, of course, but a little bewildered. Being a serious and earnest movie man he wanted to sit down and talk to his new \$400,000 acquisition.

"You know I'd still like to see Ava. There are lots of things we have to go over. Isn't it possible for me to talk to her?"

"You'll see her all right. I know Ava."

At almost that moment the telephone rang. It was Ava. "Maybe you'd better fix up that luncheon date for Stanley and me. See if he's free in an hour."

The whole basic contract for *On the Beach* was negotiated over the luncheon table—salary, days off, Ava's selection of wardrobe, Rotunno as cinematographer (providing Kramer approved of his work). I was hired by Kramer to take charge of the extensive preparations that would be necessary in Europe, supervising the making of Ava's wardrobe, making tests—all the appurtenances that go with the signing of a female star.

During the shooting of *The Naked Maja* Ava's private war with the Italian press was at its height. There were grievances on both sides. Whenever Ava sat down and gave them a story, which several times she earnestly tried to do, out in print came the same old claptrap: stories of Ava's sad life, her frustrations, her loneliness, her yearning for domesticity and her frequent assertion that she would have been happier had she remained on the farm in North Carolina. True, Ava always said these things in interviews, but from time to time she tossed off jokes showing her delicious sense of humor. Surely she entertained the newsmen well and did everything humanly possible to be gracious and courteous, even when being asked the most personal of questions. But not a line of this side of her nature ever penetrated the tiresome stories. The newsmen all agreed beforehand not to mention Frank Sinatra or Walter Chiari; but, of course, none kept his promise. Stories about her invariably centered on her romances.

As for the photographers, it was hard to rationalize their con-

stant pursuit of Ava. Even if she sat still for them, gave them sittings in her home, posed all over Rome for the traditional and worn-out publicity clichés (like tossing a coin in the fountain of Trevi), I believe she was right in claiming that she would still be chased. Her tendency to exclusiveness had become so well known that now it was a challenge to the bulb snappers to catch Ava unaware—almost in the same way as Garbo. Garbo, incidentally, had come to Rome, stopping there for a few days just to do some shopping. The onetime star had been chased from one corner of the city to the other and the pictures published of her would dismay any woman, beautiful or ugly.

At about the same time I remember showing Ava a photograph of Mrs. Zellerbach, the wife of the American Ambassador to Italy, a full back-page cover, taken at the Spoleto Music Festival. Mrs. Zellerbach obviously was describing a point of conversation with a gesture and a frown, but all the other people in her party had been cropped out of the picture so that the poor woman seemed to be standing alone in a furious temper. If Italian magazines did this to an ambassador's wife what chance did someone as controversial as Ava stand?

On the other hand, Ava accepted the invitation of Jerome Robbins, Thomas Schippers and Gian Carlo Menotti to attend a performance at Spoleto, and then insisted Schippers was "using her" when they were photographed together entering the theatre—a rather childish complaint in view of the fact that this first Music Festival of Two Worlds had attracted international publicity and brought a huge number of distinguished newspapermen to Spoleto long before Ava decided to visit it.

I had not often been through Ava's sieges with cameramen but had heard about them from her, and had seen the evidences in magazines. When I eventually faced my first one at a Via Veneto bistro, it wasn't pleasant. We hadn't been there fifteen minutes when word spread along the street that Ava was inside and in minutes about seven or eight photographers had taken

up positions at the door. Ava decided to wait it out and wait we did—until four or five in the morning. Trying to sneak out the back door was useless since it had been covered too and Mario's car was too well known to be able to slip back. Finally she had to give in and we made what became a familiar magazine layout in Italy—Ava stalking angrily out of a place in black glasses ... in the middle of the night with me trailing behind her.

As Ava sat silently at the table I told her what information I had gathered from going out and talking to the photographers. They had been chasing King Farouk on another part of the Veneto when word spread that Ava was around too. The cameramen promptly deserted Farouk to pursue Ava. "Maybe so," she said, plainly meaning that she believed I had tipped the men off.

Walter Chiari had disappeared to Capri and Ava became more fretful. The picture was physically a difficult one for her, not the least of the reasons being the heat and the heavy silk costumes she wore. Having experienced the joys—to her—of nighttime shooting for some of the exteriors, Ava decided that the interior scenes as well could be done at night, whereupon I was put in the uncomfortable position of prevailing upon the production to alter its schedule to suit her. Clementelli and I discussed the obvious: that the sound stages, minus air conditioning, would be vastly cooler in the early morning hours than at night, after having been subjected to the burning rays of the sun.

Clementelli, always ready to mollify Ava, agreed to go along with the suggestion. There were good reasons for his decision. Ava had been a co-operative, friendly, interested star. Because of Ava's legend of irascibility, Titanus had never expected this. What discord existed, and there was plenty of it in the making of *The Naked Maja*, came from other sources.

Ava had uncomplainingly continued to accept the bits of paper containing dialogue in lieu of the script she might have insisted upon. She helped with the rewriting. She insisted on

rehearsing the dance beforehand—something the production had never heard of. And one day Ava watched while a singer struggled hopelessly with the dubbing of a song. The girl had had no experience with movie technique, recording the voice first and synchronizing movements later on the set. Because of her helplessness the shooting had become hopelessly bogged down until Ava, in her dressing room in a far corner of the stage, sensing what was wrong, went on the set.

"Put the recording up," she commanded. "Play it real loud so the poor girl can hear it." Then she took the singer aside and coached her in the technique.

"Damn, they ought to know better," she said as she retreated to her dressing room, padding along in her bare feet to the despair of the collection of maids and production assistants who always hovered around her. She laughed about this habit of hers. "Seventeen years in pictures and I've never picked up a nail or splinter yet. All you have to do is to keep your eyes open."

The heat, Walter's absence, the crazy shooting schedule, the rapidly approaching conclusion of her Metro contract and the culmination of the Kramer deal, all showed in Ava's nerves and she began to worry more and more about her face and how it would photograph in her next picture. This despite the fact that she looked so well that the still photographers, obviously anxious to please her, sometimes touched up the wrong cheek.

It had been almost a year since she had seen Sir Archibald McIndoe and she decided to make a secret, hurried visit to London for a consultation. She complained that the hematoma was getting harder.

We made the trip at the end of the picture's filming, fitting it in before the dubbing. To all intents and purposes it was just a short holiday to give Ava a change of atmosphere with the hope that she might escape Rome's heat for a few days before settling down in the stuffy dubbing rooms. Sir Archibald looked Ava

over carefully and made his diagnosis. He said it was time for the slightest of operations to separate the tissue from the bone. The dead skin had attached itself, accounting for the hardness. They set a date for the operation a month later.

Frank Sinatra made a couple of trips to Europe that summer—to London to introduce the opening of a Danny Kaye picture and to the Riviera for the charity premiere of his own, *The Joker Is Wild*.

He had called Ava from London, asking as always for Mrs. Sinatra, and Ava said she would love to see him if he could steal the time to come to Rome. Sinatra arrived a week or two later with Mr. and Mrs. Peter Lawford.

But when he telephoned, Ava, for no known reason, decided not to see him. Although she had a few days off she persisted in not answering his calls, making no effort to invite him to the house or to meet him outside. Oddly the photographers were not out in force and that, as always, seemed a matter of great concern to both of them. So it could have nothing to do with the press.

Early one morning, taking Rags, the corgi Sinatra had given her, Ava climbed up the Piazza di Spagna to the Hassler Hotel where he was staying.

"Rags was so happy to see him," she told me later. "And do you know what I did? I shouldn't have, I'm so sorry now. I gave him back my wedding ring and came right home. I told him to give the ring to his English lady."

Ava turned away from me to hide her tears. Now I had the answer to the sudden indifference to Sinatra's visit to Rome. The papers had been filled with his accounts of his sudden friendship with Lady Beatty, a young English beauty who had been at his side constantly during Sinatra's London visit.

If she had wanted to, she couldn't have apologized. Saying "I'm sorry" simply did not belong to Ava's proud Southern

Belle character. Sinatra, deeply hurt, pulled every wire available to obtain a reservation out of Rome and was on his way to New York within hours.

The last weeks of *The Naked Maja* were fun. Rome had cooled a trifle and the one time Ava would not have me around was when she was dubbing. So with the apartment as my headquarters—I had rigged up a sort of office in the guest room—I was able to concentrate on the business at hand, getting the schedule for the costume fittings and the tests and putting together the bits and pieces for *On the Beach*. As Ava left for work every day we quipped that the life was ideal—that shooing the woman off to do the job was just as it should be. And the man should stay at home.

I put together a few parties for the company. Ava had given none after *Barefoot Contessa* but she adored *The Naked Maja* crew. And they came and danced until the wee hours of the morning—every single one, down to the gatekeeper and the bartender at the studio bar who mistakenly arrived in his white jacket believing he was expected to serve. Ava shooed him home and ordered him to get back pronto in proper clothes, as a guest or not at all. He showed up an hour or so later, looking handsome and charming. The girls were toppled off their feet, never having seen him in anything but his restaurant uniform.

For all the pleasantness of these days and the relaxation they afforded (Walter was still away and Ava was not so concerned by his absence), I dreaded the time when she would be free. I knew what idleness could do to Ava and wondered how I would ever keep her occupied. Certainly there was enough to do, what with *On the Beach* fittings and tests, the appointment with Sir Archibald and a week or so of vacation that Ava constantly talked about. But Ava had a way of botching the best-laid plans.

The bullfighting season was on. This was the first year of the comeback of Luis Miguel Dominguin and from all the reports we read and heard from friends in Spain who drifted

through Rome he was fighting magnificently. Ava had never seen him fight and that held priority on her entertainment calendar when we returned to Madrid—that and a flamenco party.

## 15.

To call our few weeks of “vacation” in Madrid disastrous would be an outrageous understatement.

Although the months in Rome with *The Naked Maja* were long, hot, tedious and occasionally cranky, embittered from time to time by rows between Ava and Walter, still they contained some semblance of order—or at least what passed for order in Ava's life. In Rome there ha' been work to keep her occupied.

Beyond a fitting of the costumes for *On the Beach*, Ava was free in Madrid, to rest and enjoy herself and to embark on that ever-promised and long-postponed “health kick.” But within a day—almost hours—of returning home Ava was restless, upset by every trifle, complaining, battling with the servants and throwing them out of the house with monotonous regularity.

Walter had suddenly reappeared, commuting between Madrid and Rome as always between takes of whatever picture he happened to be making. He did so many we could never keep up with him. No other actor, Ava and I knew, would have dared to jump around so irresponsibly as he. Again and again Ava muttered, “If I did that—even once—they'd crucify me. The press would be on my neck. They'd say I was drunk, and they'd sue me. How does he get away with it?”

Considering the trouble involved in darting between the two cities, Walter's visits were anything but rewarding. The bickering rarely stopped, and it was impossible to tell where one quarrel left off and the next began.

The arrangements for the wardrobe fittings had been made to involve the minimum of effort by Ava. The dressmaker had agreed to bring the costumes to Madrid, thus sparing Ava the photographers' gauntlet that invariably greeted her at the Ciampino in Rome. But the woman's mother lay at death's door, making it impossible to keep the appointment as scheduled, adding another link to the chain of confusion.

Another problem disturbing Ava was the failure of her agents, William Morris, and her business manager, Morgan Maree, Jr., to advise her of the Australian tax situation in connection with her proposed status as an "associate producer" of *On the Beach*. Being a resident of Spain and not of the United States, her tax position in Australia was different from co-stars Gregory Peck, Fred Astaire, and Anthony Perkins. She could not file her tax report under the reciprocal agreement governing income earned by Americans in the United Kingdom and vice versa—a tax statute permitting nationals of either country to pay only one tax, not two as in years past. The solution lay then in making Ava an associate producer by claiming that she was doing research and so forth, and that she would exercise some supervisory powers. Thus, she would qualify as a "co-manufacturer" of the film with Stanley Kramer and be exempt from paying taxes on her \$400,000 salary.

The situation was extremely delicate, wholly dependent on the acquiescence and good will of the Australian tax authorities who, as in most countries, did not move as quickly or so impetuously as Ava Gardner.

"Why don't they make up their mind? Hell, we haven't got a deal, and I'm sure not going to Australia and work my head off for six months and pay the government ninety per cent of it! To hell with the fittings. Call them off."

As explanations fell on unwilling ears, the trick, in changing Ava's mood, lay in bringing up another subject, even one as certain to spread more gloom such as mentioning Sir Archibald McIndoe and the operation. Although agreeing that it would

be done and having set a date for surgery, Ava was not convinced that it would be beneficial. She was far from reaching a decision.

As she sat before the mirror of her dressing table she would say despairingly, "I'm ruined, what's the use?" and "The operation won't help. Look at my face, it droops on one side; my mouth is crooked. What's the use? And it was the best side too."

As well as I knew Ava, I could never see the change she always talked about in the contour of her face, although the lines settling more permanently under her eyes had become more noticeable. Wrinkles had begun to furrow more deeply into her neck. These, I didn't need to be told, had come from the passing of the years.

Then William Morris wrote that Metro was claiming an extra three weeks on her contract because of a production report saying she had been ill that length of time during the shooting of *Bhowani Junction*. It was a cruel and useless gesture by the company but obviously necessary because of the enormous legal complications contained in a movie star's contract. No doubt one of Metro's lawyers would have suffered a cracked skull, had he not revealed the finding as the studio and Ava wound up their contract.

William Morris and Morgan Maree obtained statements from Director George Cukor and Ava's co-star in *Bhowani Junction*, Stewart Granger, disproving Metro's claim. On the basis of these, Bennie Thau agreed to tuck the letter away in his desk and forget it. The correspondence between William Morris and Metro boiled down simply to putting it on record—a fair arrangement all around.

Far from being pleased that the minor technicality had been solved so quickly, Ava ranted because William Morris had spoken to Cukor and not consulted her first. Not a day passed that Ava could not find an outrage. I could not remember a period in the years I had known her that life had been so turbulent.

Nothing satisfied her. Nothing gave her pleasure. Her new

car, a Facal Vega, was a clunker; the servants were stealing eggs; I couldn't be reached when she wanted me. On and on it went.

We set foot out of Madrid three times: once to visit a bull farm and on two consecutive days to watch Luis Miguel Dominguin in the bull ring at Guadalajara, about an hour's drive. I was conscious of the drama of Ava seeing him fight for the first time. She and I found our seats in the first row and the procession of the bullfighters began. Forgetting that I not only knew him but had translated their conversations several year before, she pointed Dominguin out to me.

Tastefully, Dominguin did not dedicate a bull to her. Had this happened anything could have been expected from the local *aficionados*. As readily as they could have cheered her they might also have jeered, poked fun and derided the faded romance between Ava and their idol.

As Dominguin fought, Ava clutched my arm and her fingernails scratched through my light jacket. The spectacle terrified her but she took special pains to conceal any expression on her face—fearful, naturally, that the photographers might catch her with her emotions down.

When on the second day Dominguin, just as indifferent, merely acknowledged Ava with a smile out of the side of his mouth, she believed he was also taking pains to avoid reaching any point in the ring where a photographer might snap even an out-of-focus shot of the two ex-lovers. Frankly I felt Dominguin had a lot more on his mind.

It was my first bullfight with Ava, and her enormous knowledge of the subject was astonishing. She knew not only what was going on at the moment but what would happen next, all the names of the passes, the traditions—in fact, the whole history of bullfighting. She made the afternoon completely absorbing for me and reading Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon* later added little to the knowledge she had imparted.

Dominguin, it seems, had been her tutor and from a distance as far as the corral she could tell whether the dust the bull shook

from his back was plain earth or produced because the animal had been slugged throughout the night with huge sacks of dirt to weaken his kidneys before the fight. She pointed out how Dominguin's long arms kept him at a safe distance from the bull although he appeared to be performing the most daring passes. Having learned from me the universal application of the word "showman," she fastened it on him.

There were no other bullfights of consequence around Madrid after Dominguin left for the north, so Ava returned to fuming about the dressmaker's delay although she could not have been more charming or sympathetic when the woman finally arrived with several trunks of costumes. Fitting them took a few hours of an evening and there now remained no excuse for Ava not to take one of the half-dozen trips she had talked about during the summer.

Walter was either finishing off or starting a new skirmish when Ava announced she and I were leaving the following morning for Paris. As Walter was packing his duffel bag for a flight to Rome, I hoped, but with no conviction, that this meant he was not planning to visit Paris too.

Through the years Ava and I had talked a great deal about Paris. She always insisted she hated it. Whenever Ava spoke of Paris this way, I assured her she was mistaken, that it was because of her mood or that she had been there with the wrong people. It seemed inconceivable to me that anyone professing to enjoy a continental life and able to live it as capriciously and luxuriously as Ava could not find the slightest degree of gratification in Paris. Repeatedly I had promised her that one day she would see Paris with me and would enjoy it.

Ava's decision stirred recollections of that promise years before when we had nearly gone there together. Max Youngstein had offered Ava a week's holiday in Paris with me, but she had been forced to turn it down because of her conferences on *Bhowani Junction*.

There was a vast difference between the Ava of then and

now. True the global junket had not been exactly easy, but four years before she had been a more disciplined, conscientious and stable person. Now, and especially after her unhappy month in Madrid, I doubted I could make Paris a success for her. But when the suitcases were dragged out and the perennial packing commenced I determined to try. I told Ava this: "I'll do everything possible to make it a ball—stay up four nights running and shoo *you* off to bed instead of the other way round!"

"You wouldn't dare," she laughed. "No one can stay up later than I do."

A telephone call to Charles Smadja, head of United Artists in Europe, arranged for a car to meet us and for accommodations at the Raphael, a quiet, residential hotel off the Etoile. Smadja eagerly agreed to keep the trip a secret from the press and expressed regrets that he wouldn't be there because of a business trip. Moreover the office would be empty of any responsible person because of out-of-town engagements and vacations.

I wanted to demur, feeling that Ava, after all, was starring in one of the most important pictures on the production schedule of United Artists next year and that at least he should summon Francis Winikus from London to do the honors in behalf of the company. Remembering Smadja's dim view of entertaining expenses and knowing that entertaining *any* Hollywood celebrity —much less Ava—could be costly, I didn't. Anyway, I mused, we would probably be better off alone.

I was packed and ready to leave for the house when Walter Chiari called. He asked me to tell Ava that he could not arrive in Paris until the evening of the next day, a message to dampen all the resolve and enthusiasm I had for the trip. Paris would be no different from Rome and Madrid, just another city in which to view their arguing from a grandstand seat.

During the trip Ava's spirits soared. She seemed relaxed and anxious to put the tensions of the past month behind her. The quick disposition Air France made for us at Orly Airport

pleased her. So did the fact that there were only two unobtrusive newspapermen on hand, the airport photographer and reporter. The latter, after taking only one or two shots, disappeared—quite a different procedure from Italy and its insatiable cameramen. The Air France public relations officer remembered me from the year before when my assignment had been to persuade the airline to hold up its flights between Paris and Nice and London for Mr. and Mrs. Mike Todd. Ava naturally enjoyed our tall tales of adventure in those tall days.

The Cadillac car and the tall, good-looking French chauffeur who spoke nearly perfect English charmed her. So did the sumptuous Louis XIV suite at the Raphael. Pleased as a child Ava flung off her shoes and wandered happily through the three-room apartment, admiring the living room, huge bathtub and the magnificent bedroom. "This is the way Paris should be," she laughed happily. Eager not to lose a second of it, she began making up and dressing for dinner.

Seeing Ava happy was a wonderful change, and my misgivings about the Paris trip gradually began to thaw—as they always did when Ava relaxed and turned on her abundance of charm. She enjoyed the good French cooking and the privacy she received at the restaurant I chose for dinner, a semiposh place, busy at lunch with a theatrical clientele but quiet in the evening. Later, we visited a few bistros and one jazz joint Ava remembered from a previous visit.

It wasn't even dawn—the shank of the evening by Ava's standard—when she admitted to being tired and suggested we go home. With a yawn to punctuate her question Ava asked if I weren't done in.

"Not at all," I retorted. "Never felt better. I told you I could stay up forever in Paris."

"Well I can't—not tonight," she laughed. "I've had it. You do whatever you want."

Back at the hotel we had a nightcap and without finishing it, Ava headed for her bedroom. "I'm going to bed. See you tomorrow."

As I crossed the hall to my room, the keys to all our doors, at least a half dozen of them, jingled merrily in my pocket. I felt wonderful. For the first time since Ava had asked me to be her personal manager I could chalk up a period of nearly twenty-four hours during which she had not been cranky, nor had had a fight, nor insulted anyone. Even more satisfying—she had not been miserable herself. Professionally the day had been a triumph and personally I was just plain happy.

Next day the main job was to arrange a table for the evening at the Lido, the internationally famous cabaret on the Champs-Elysées which, for all its tourist trappings, is one of the best entertainment buys in the world. Ava, curiously, had never seen its dazzling, spectacular floor show.

We had gone over the strategy at length, and I prevailed upon her not to make a drama, a mystery, out of the evening. This could only mean that photographers would discover her there and sweep down on the Lido like a herd of locusts, and we would then be spending the evening fighting them off. We decided to make reservations through the publicity man for the Lido, George Cravanne, suggesting that sometime during the evening a house photographer be assigned to take a few shots and that would be the finish of it.

Hearing this Cravanne commented, "She needn't have any taken if she doesn't want to."

I disagreed. "No, forbidding anyone to shoot would only invite one of the girls at the club [who peddle souvenir photos] to attempt a sneak shot. And that would be worse." Cravanne saw the point.

Just as Ava awoke in the late afternoon, there was a call from Walter which I answered. Recognizing my voice he wasted no time on amenities as he hollered: "I'm in Milan. I'll be in Paris around nine."

"Good," I hollered back. "I'll meet you at the airport. We're all going to the Lido. Now here's Ava."

As I started to move the phone over to Ava still in bed, Walter's voice came through the receiver, "I can't talk to her now. I'm leaving. They called the plane." He hung up.

One glance at Ava told the story. The Paris holiday was over.

She puffed furiously on a cigarette, scratched it out angrily on a tray. "So he doesn't want to talk to me?"

"Of course he wanted to talk to you," I protested. "Don't be silly. He couldn't. He'd have missed the plane. Now really, getting upset over a little thing like this is childish. What's more *you* know it."

Just then photographer Sam Leven's arrival was announced and I left to meet him in the lobby to talk over *On the Beach* still photography scheduled for a week or so hence in Rome. The negotiations were not involved but time-consuming. When I returned, Ava was at the dressing table getting ready for the Lido, and it was time to meet Walter. When I mentioned this to Ava she looked straight ahead at the mirror and answered coldly, "You stay right here. Send the driver or let Walter find his own way."

Until then, regardless of my private feelings, I had taken only one side in the relentless quarrels—Ava's. I might think, and frequently did, that both were fools, but I owed my complete loyalty to her. This time, however, the evidence was so overwhelmingly in Walter's favor I had to say the truth. Moreover there was still that determination, however cooled, to keep Paris pleasant and happy. "I'll send the driver," I said, "but promise me you won't battle tonight. You've wanted to go to the Lido for so long. Walter didn't mean any slight. You know that. He simply had to catch the plane or not get here at all."

"Don't worry," said Ava, "I won't battle." The coldness in her voice said otherwise.

An hour or so later Walter was at the Raphael and as Ava finished dressing I entertained him at the bar. Ava arrived looking

gorgeous except for the fixed expression in her eyes and the haughtiness of her stride. She didn't lose a second, not even to sit down.

"So you didn't want to talk to me on the telephone."

Futilely Walter sought to explain, mixing Italian and English and garbling both. And the more voluble he became the more withdrawn Ava was as she toyed aimlessly with a martini, avoiding both Walter's eyes and mine. After endless minutes and nervous stirring of martini glasses Ava arose and headed for the front door. Walter and I followed, packed ourselves beside her in the car. Still silent, we stopped for another martini at the Prince de Galle, silent and sullen enough to pass for pallbearers rather than a trio out for a night on the town at the Lido.

No sooner had we arrived there, with Ava escorted to her place at the front and center table, than from three different points in the room flash bulbs popped. Promptly she arose, picked up her purse and headed for the exit, Walter and I trailing behind like a couple of puppies. Excitedly, the photographers followed. They had come for a rare picture of Ava, were delighted that the evening afforded them an opportunity to photograph her with Chiari. But this—a temperamental flight—was more than they had ever dreamed.

As the driver had been told to have his dinner, there was no car in front, so we hailed a taxi and inside the torrent of recrimination began in earnest. It was a stupid unnecessary fight. As for the photography, it had been agreed upon, although Cravenne perhaps had double-crossed me by inviting regular newspaper photographers to the Lido instead of using one of the girls. Being French, however, the newsmen would surely have left after getting their photos. And possibly Cravenne may not have understood my use of the words "house photographer." As the cab started across the Seine to the Left Bank—we had told the driver to go nowhere in particular—I made apologies and said I was leaving, that the situation between Walter and Ava was personal, none of my business.

Ava agreed. I hopped out and wandered back to the Champs-Elysées looking for the car. Not finding it I slid down a side street, found a lonely stool in a lonely bar and remained until it closed.

Along with the dawn, in the wee small hours of the morning, I was greeted by the Paris newspapers which made as much of the incident as possible. **AVA FLEES PHOTOGRAPHERS**, they headlined and *Paris Soir* carried an unbecoming picture of Ava in flight that ran four columns wide and down the entire front page.

I tossed the papers aside. I didn't have to read the all too familiar story—an angry Ava stomping away from the press in a public place like the Lido. Back at the hotel I slept fitfully, although knowing Ava wouldn't emerge from her bed until late in the afternoon, probably early evening.

It was then that I found her sitting in the living room of her apartment, Walter sulking in a corner. No words were being exchanged. The floor was covered with the Paris papers.

"You saw them, I suppose?" she said.

"Yes. The Lido set it all up but not the way it worked. Anyhow you agreed to photos. I don't see that there's an argument."

"It should have been done differently."

"How differently?"

Ava didn't answer because there was no answer.

Just then a waiter came in with champagne. He went through the flourishes of opening it, poured three glasses, served them and placed the bucket on a table beside Ava's chair. Ava puffed furiously on a cigarette.

With a "*Bon soir, madame*" the waiter left. As the door closed behind him, Ava raised her still-burning cigarette in her thumb and third finger, flipped it the length of the room as though she were aiming at a cuspidor. It landed on the carpet.

"The French," she said savagely. "I hate every one of them."

Near the door I picked up the cigarette, snuffed it out with

my fingers and held it in the palm of my hand. "Are you going out?" I asked.

"No," said Ava sullenly, "I'm staying right here in this room until the plane leaves tomorrow morning. And I might leave earlier if I can get a reservation."

"Well, I'm going to dinner. Do you want anything?"

"Yes, colorless nail polish."

"I'll get it for you," I said and noticing the cigarette butt in my hand, I popped it into an ash tray and went out, trying hard not to slam the door.

The flipped cigarette had become a symbol of everything that was wrong with me, wrong with Ava, wrong in our relationship. I told myself I had gone as far as I could with Ava, that there was more in life than traveling around the world with such a woman. In my room I started to write Ava a note saying I was finished, but remembering my frequent advice to her I put it aside. "Never make up your mind on an empty stomach. Table it," I had told her over and over again. I went out to dinner and sent the nail polish to Ava's suite by a bellboy.

Late that night or early in the morning I returned to the hotel, finished the note, saying that I was leaving her. Too perturbed to wait for the elevator I walked downstairs arranging all the things that belonged to Ava, her passport, tickets, money, etc. I checked into Le Chambiges, a small residential hotel I always visited in Paris, and expected the first respite in months.

But it didn't happen, even when I made sure that Ava had caught the plane to Rome. I felt stupid and idiotic. There are far worse things in the world than tossing lighted cigarettes on French carpets. In all the years of our friendship, for all her temperament, I had never personally met a moment of abuse.

The weeks ahead were filled with responsibilities I had undertaken for her and Stanley Kramer: putting the test together in Rome, shipping the costumes, the photography session with Leven and moving Ava through the States to Melbourne. My leaving Ava would cause considerable inconvenience to all.

But by now pride had asserted itself and the decision seemed to be fast and irrevocable. I spent the day wandering around Paris feeling lost and miserable. Only an idiot would deny Ava had become a part of my life and I of hers.

The following day there was a call from Maria Pia in Rome, who, knowing me for years, was aware that I could be found at Le Chambiges. She told me Ava was worried and upset and she suggested I telephone her immediately. Although it was early, Ava came to the line instantly. I told her how sorry I was, admitted the note was nasty and could only explain that the whole affair came from my deep personal disappointment that Paris had turned out so badly. Deep personal disappointment I knew very well was a luxury a personal manager could not afford. Ava told me to fly to Rome as soon as possible.

I met her there the following morning, not languishing in bed as usual but fully dressed sitting upright on a straight chair in the living room of her Grand Hotel suite, looking as much like a grammar school principal as my memory of one could produce. She lost no time in preliminaries after I had repeated my apologies.

"That was the nastiest note I've ever received," she began. "Now I know what you think of me. And that's pretty nasty too." I tried to protest but it was useless.

"It doesn't matter. I don't care. Now I know where I stand with you. And I don't care about that either. Maybe it's better. But the fact is I need you. I can get along without you but I like you and I'm used to you. You know the ropes, the movie business, the languages, how to handle people. I'll admit it's not very pretty for you to sit around and watch me destroy myself—and that's what I'm doing. I know all that. I can be mean and nasty and awful. God knows you've seen enough. But you know that half the time I don't mean it. I'm sorry a minute afterward and at night I cry myself to sleep.

"You know I can't pay you what you should be getting—not now at any rate. But someday I will. I'm not promising you we'll

be together forever but for the next few years at least. You can make some loot and do what both of us want—to get out of this rat race.

"In a few days I'll be through with Metro. I wouldn't admit this to anyone else but I'm afraid, terribly afraid. I never worked for any other company. I never even had another job. I hate their guts but for seventeen years they've been there and I just did what they told me to, going from one lousy picture to the other.

"Now I've got to do my own thinking. The damned agents keep sending me the same scripts I turned down last year. That's no good. I need someone to get me going—you know I'm lazy—someone to make me work, make me read scripts, pay attention to the mail. You know all these things and I like having you around.

"I'm going to make a lot of money in the next couple of years, just as fast as I can. And I'm going to stash it away because I'm not going to last much longer. Maybe you can quit too."

"Okay," I said, "let's go to work." I went to the desk, collected some papers that needed doing and went down to my room thinking, as I had so many times, of the waste Ava insisted on making of her remarkable faculties.

I had just heard as lucid an explanation as Ava had ever made of herself, and I had listened to many. My chagrin was the greater because of the astonishing thing Ava had done—turning my lack of professionalism into a devastating indictment of herself. Her capacity for objectivity about herself had always been impressive but nothing before had matched this speech for candor and honesty.

I hoped, even as I doubted, that she meant what she said. This was the first time in months she had with any degree of earnestness spoken about her career. Perhaps the cold fact that the day of separation from Metro was finally at hand had stirred her into a realization that her responsibilities to herself were greater than constant fun seeking.

Regardless, I knew though that not one, two, or twenty-three million dollars would ever provide the answers for Ava. There lay the rub.

## 16.

Evidently the realization that someone could walk out on her had a salutary effect on Ava and during the weeks we spent in Rome for *On the Beach* tests and final wardrobe fittings, she and Walter maintained a warmer, closer relationship than I had seen before. They dined together constantly and alone, visiting out-of-the-way places where they would be less likely to be haunted by photographers.

The appointment with Sir Archibald had been canceled and Ava made fewer references to her face. Then, unexpectedly, came a telephone call from Sir Archibald. Would Ava, he asked, come to London and appear at the opening of a bazaar given in behalf of the nurses' pension fund at the hospital of which he was surgeon in charge? The visit would serve the double purpose of giving him an opportunity to look at her cheek again.

Although she had made no appearances of that sort since her fall and very few in her career, Ava unhesitatingly agreed. During the war she felt a moral obligation to visit the Hollywood Canteen and dance with the soldiers but she confessed to hating the duty, feeling herself too shy to appear comfortable around strangers. She certainly could never bring herself to appear in any of the shows the Canteen put on.

We altered our schedule to accommodate the visit to London and at the airport in Rome we picked up the London newspapers. Ava's opening of the bazaar at East Grinstead, a small village outside London, was front-page news.

"No dark glasses, Ava," I warned when I showed her the clipping. "There'll be a mob of photographers at the airport."

There was indeed, and it was the first time for months that Ava walked willingly into such a battery. She was shaking like a leaf but came through handsomely, answering their questions quietly and earnestly by saying she owed so much to Sir Archibald and was happy to return his kindness to her by appearing at the bazaar.

Sir Archibald's car and driver whisked us through London out to the country and his lovely old English manor home at East Grinstead, where we were greeted by Lady McIndoe and eventually Sir Archibald. They were charming, gracious people and energetic Lady McIndoe moved in on Ava, that admittedly lazy Southern belle, as she had never been moved in on before. It was like Grant taking Richmond.

Ava offered no resistance to the program as Lady McIndoe outlined it—a whole round of cocktail and dinner parties including a Sunday breakfast at a nearby home. This I thought would surely raise a protest but Ava nodded her head meekly and inquired what she was expected to do at the bazaar. The appearance required little more than being present on the first day, selling her autograph and later assisting at the auction of the things that had been donated, mainly knitted goods and blankets.

Sir Archibald, a New Zealand-born plastic surgeon, had been knighted for his work during the war in restoring the faces and limbs of the R.A.F. and was an internationally famous surgeon. Through the years, the hospital bazaar had become a special activity of Lady McIndoe; often before it had been opened by various other stars, English and American, anxious to express their appreciation of Sir Archibald's magnificent war work that had earned him his knighthood. McIndoe was a tough, straightforward man who tolerated no self-pity from his R.A.F. patients, whom he blandly called his guinea pigs. They had suffered indescribable injuries and it was his job to fix them up. Any

crying they did was on their own time, not when he was administering therapy. A number of them visited him during Ava's stay and their lost limbs were discussed as casually as though they were common colds.

However accustomed the McIndoes may have been to housing and entertaining theatrical celebrities, none in their experience had prepared them for the onslaught that was produced by Ava. The telephone never stopped ringing as newspapers from London called again and again, asking for every little detail of Ava's visit: who the dinner guests were, what was being served, what was she wearing and, of course, could they photograph the McIndoes at home with their distinguished guest? Lady McIndoe firmly put her foot down on the suggestion.

At the end of the evening, when the guests had departed, Sir Archibald, Ava and I got down to the business of the operation. All during the night I could see him watching her face carefully. He explained his diagnosis—the slight incision would relieve the pressure and give the cheek a chance to resume its natural texture more quickly. On the other hand it didn't need to be done immediately; it could wait until after *On the Beach* but it would have to take place sometime. The operation was anything but serious. It required only a matter of seconds and Ava could leave after a night's rest. It was no more complicated than pulling a tooth.

Almost from the moment in Rome that she had talked to Sir Archibald, Ava had known she would consent to the operation. There remained only the business of working out details. Because Ava would never have consented otherwise, Sir Archibald gamely went along with the farce that it had to be completely secret. He was a brilliant psychologist as well as a fine doctor and throwing Ava into the battalion of photographers was one of the best things that ever happened to her. For that moment at least it diminished some of her fears of the camera.

Just as she faced the cameramen so quietly at the airport in

London, she was outwardly poised and sure when she attended the bazaar next day. Every London paper sent down photographers and crack reporters. They surrounded Ava and for the first time she sat down and gave a coherent, intelligent, honest account of her accident and all the details of her visit the year before to Sir Archibald. The doctor, hovering in the background, pulled reporter friends aside. "Just look at that face. You can see it has never been touched by a knife."

Ava returned to the bazaar in the afternoon and tried her hand at being an auctioneer. And the same process was repeated. She charmed the reporters right off their feet, and sold everything in sight. The next day when she read in the papers the warm, glowing reports of her appearance she seemed surprised as a child. "Why, they actually wrote it just as I said it."

"Of course they did," I commented, "because you were frank and honest with them."

Always ready to depreciate herself, Ava's answer was typical. "It had nothing to do with me. It's because of the respect they have for Sir Archibald."

Late that afternoon a newspaperman arrived at the door and asked to see me. He told me that word had just reached London that Tyrone Power was dead. His newspaper wanted to know if Ava would say something in the way of a tribute to the actor with whom she had appeared in *The Sun Also Rises*. I hesitated a second before bringing the news to Ava. She had never been close to Power until, of all times, the week before when she had dined with him and his bride of just a few months. She had told me how much she enjoyed meeting the young, pretty wife who, like herself, was from the South. "And Ty," she raved on, "he's like a new man—warm and friendlier than I ever found him before."

Since she would find it out eventually, keeping the news from her would serve no purpose. Her first reaction was curious, but typical—the newsman had fabricated the story to trick her into something. I objected forcefully, "Look, Ava,

**newspapermen may be a shabby lot in your book but it would take a lot of gall to make up this one."**

Finally she believed me and said what I imagined she would. "Simply tell him I am shocked and I can't think of anything to say."

She went to the telephone and put in a call for Mrs. Power in Madrid.

While we waited she looked at me strangely. "You know. This isn't funny. This hits kind of close. He was what you're always saying—in our age bracket. I'm worried."

The operation was scheduled to take place very early the next morning, an hour in advance of the usual operating time at the hospital. Sir Archibald, Ava, an assisting doctor and I bundled into the car and sped off to the hospital, which was lonely and deserted except for the people who had been called in especially.

Ava was given an anesthetic and the team waited until it had taken effect. I excused myself from the invitation to watch from the observer's gallery and someone brought me breakfast. By the time I had finished, Ava was being wheeled out of the operating room. A few minutes later she had recovered and asked for me. I went to her little recovery room and saw her face swathed in bandages. "Did you see it?" she asked.

"Heavens no, Ava, I was too nervous."

Then she began to cry. "I'm so afraid. I know it didn't work. I just know it."

"Of course it worked, Ava. It was so tiny. How could it go wrong?" Then I tried to joke with her, as I had done often before, by saying during her deep moods of depression that she certainly would have been a great star of Irish plays, doing old Synge and O'Casey crones who sit around and mumble about the troubles of this world while their men whittle wooden nails for their coffins. "I think I'll buy you some whittling tools," I remarked.

"Don't bother, honey, I'll marry a whittler." She fell off to sleep.

Since she would be unconscious the better part of the day, I went to London to do some business and could not get in touch with the house that evening. The McIndoes wearily had cut off their service. Being worried I stayed close to the hotel room waiting for a call from them.

It came early in the morning. Ava was up and ready to return to Rome. She said she felt well and certainly sounded fine. I made the reservations and drove out to East Grinstead to pick her up. She was dressed and ready and except for a slight dis-coloration and a little swelling Ava was her same beautiful self. Of course I told her this but all she could say was, "I'm not sure. I just don't know."

She told me what happened after I left. She had slept until very late in the afternoon by which time the hospital was alive with activity. To leave unobserved she had wrapped her head in a blanket and sped to Sir Archibald's house. Later he removed the bandages, taking care to give her one of his superb martinis beforehand. Ava faced a mirror and could see for herself how minor the operation had been.

We went to the airport and were fortunate both in London and Rome in not meeting the press.

"So you didn't see the operation," Ava said as she poked nervously at her face.

"Of course I didn't, Ava. I told you that."

"Then, how can we be sure?"

"Sure of what?"

"Sure that Sir Archibald really did the operation, that maybe one of the other doctors . . ." Her voice trailed away. She looked at herself again. "Maybe I was just one of his guinea pigs."

## 17.

No one had better intentions than Ava of making a success of Australia, especially in respect to public relations. I warned her that she would be living in a fish bowl because Australia, large or not, was an island, and when on an island there's just no place to go undetected. Moreover she would be a personality in a country and a city that would be terribly curious about her.

Of course Australia had seen the biggest and most important American and English stars but they had paid only short visits to the country. *On the Beach* was the first important motion picture company to go there. That the story was about Australia would heighten interest. We would be there four months and Ava had a great deal to do. I was tactfully trying my best to support her own expression that this would be a good time for her to go on one of her health kicks.

She listened and seemed to agree and I kept wishing I had more firsthand information about Australia, what we could expect and how Ava could best be handled. Stanley Kramer had offered to send me there ahead of time—a sort of scouting expedition to select Ava's house and attend to other preliminary details. Ava foolishly had refused, saying she could not travel without me. Just as foolishly, I had rejected Kramer's offer to head the unit publicity department in Melbourne.

I had, with reason, begun to feel far from sanguine about my position with Ava, although from a professional point of view things had gone along much better since the episode in Paris. There were fewer telephone calls in the middle of the night. Although long, the working day narrowed itself into times when I

really accomplished something and wasn't expected to provide company. Things were getting done, but the warm, personal rapport Ava wanted no longer existed.

Like the laws of the jungle, Hollywood's are inexorable. You measure a man's importance by how soon a telephone call is returned. In passing through Hollywood on our way to Australia I had arrived first and Ava's coterie of managers and agents literally jumped to attention at my every request, regardless of how minor. One even offered me his home to live in during the stay. But after Ava's arrival the staccato ringing of the phone stopped abruptly, for they had heard what I was not to find out for months, and then by accident—that I was being dispossessed by Bill Gallagher who, for more than twenty years, had been personal manager for Tyrone Power. He was being put into the post by Morgan Maree, also Power's business manager, who, of course, knew him a lot better than he knew me. And of course Gallagher then needed a job.

Consequently, the Kramer contract on which I had labored for weeks was not even shown to me. Ava's men brought it to her in the middle of the night. She signed it without reading it, unaware that the specific points that worried her, approval of still pictures and TV coverage, had not been pinpointed as clearly as they would have been had I been given the courtesy of finishing my responsibilities.

I recognized that my going to Australia was something of a farce and had seriously considered bowing out a few days beforehand. However, being unable to discover just where the difficulty lay I went through with it.

Ava wasn't talking to anyone when, with Beatrice and me, she boarded the plane on New Year's Day from San Francisco where we were to pick up the Qantas flight to Melbourne by way of Honolulu, Fiji and Sydney. Before she reached Los Angeles Airport she discovered she had forgotten the dress she planned to wear for her arrival "down under." A friend went

back to retrieve it, hoping it would make a plane that would meet us in San Francisco.

It failed to make connections and as we started across the Pacific Ava began to worry. "I've got to make a good impression," Ava said, "and that dress was just right. The others are all too elaborate or just frilly summer things. I don't know what to do."

By the time she had reached Honolulu she was so distraught over the dress and the fatiguing days of packing and unpacking between Rome, New York and Hollywood that she decided to stay over and to send me on ahead. It was of no consequence. She was traveling far enough ahead of her due date in Melbourne and there would be no dislocation of the picture schedule.

Because interest was so high in Australia about Ava I suggested that she use the story of the dress as the excuse to explain her delayed arrival. It was cute and feminine and I thought I could handle it properly. It was almost the truth and a lot better than the old wheeze that she was indisposed.

"No," said Ava scornfully of the suggestion. "Tell them I have an earache. The dress seems silly."

I wasn't without a star for long. Fred Astaire joined the flight, having flown to Honolulu a few days earlier to rest up there before making the long trip to Australia. The dancer was charm itself when I introduced myself the next morning, and he was delighted to meet someone who remembered his glorious days as a Broadway star with his sister, Adele. At some point in our conversation Astaire mentioned that without Ava there wouldn't be much of a stir at the airport, probably no press turnout at all. "Are you kidding?" I exclaimed astonished. "There'll be a mob. Do you think that Australia has never heard of Ginger Rogers?"

Astaire looked worried. I continued, "There'll be photographers by the dozens. You're news whether you realize it or not."

"But I just figured I could amble through, hanging on to Ava's skirts, wearing my hat."

I knew right away he was talking about his hair piece. I shook my head sadly. "You don't mean to tell me you've forgotten your wig?"

"Not my wig exactly," answered Astaire. "I call it the octopus, a kind of fringy affair that doesn't make me look like a faded juvenile. No, it's in the hold."

"Well that's nothing. We'll get it out. We stop at Fiji. Do you know what suitcase it's in?"

"Do you mean to say you can do that sort of thing—get a bag out after it's in the hold?"

"Sure, why not? I'll take care of it for you."

Still disbelieving, Astaire consulted a neatly typed list. "Here it is—in number so-and-so."

I called the steward and explained Astaire's dilemma and promptly had assurance that the bag could be pulled out and the octopus retrieved. Astaire's amazement continued. "I hope Ava doesn't mind my borrowing you as a manager on this trip."

All the ingredients were present in Melbourne to make life interesting and pleasant for Ava. It was summer and within an hour of the city there lay lovely isolated coves for swimming, which Ava did so well. There were tennis courts, and the best instructors. Ava, when she did play, loved competing with the pros. Aware of this and promising herself to use them, Ava had carried her rackets from Madrid along with a thousand and one items she always felt were necessary.

Night life was practically nonexistent in the city, consisting of one or two restaurant-cabarets which featured second-rate vaudeville acts. Ordinary bars closed at six in the evening. Mainly there was time to relax and take it easy. Ava's schedule of shooting days came to half of that of the picture and there were periods when she had as many as five consecutive days free.

To judge from her radiance and disposition when she finally arrived in Sydney, marvelously recuperated after her few days in Honolulu, she was determined to enjoy her stay and make the most of the trip to what was, for her, a new country, one with which Ava had no quarrel and which surely had no bone to pick with her.

Ava had never met more than a handful of Australians in her life and the "Aussie" crew aboard the airplane had delighted her. "They're such nice people, so warm and friendly, like Americans. I think I'm going to like the place."

There was a huge throng to greet her at Sydney and Melbourne, and, as only Ava could, she charmed the press off their feet and the flowery stories that filled the front pages the next day could not have shown more promise of a happy relationship.

Housing Ava in Melbourne evidently had posed an enormous problem for the Kramer Company. One rumor circulated that no one with a suitable home would rent to her. The company eventually was compelled to take over the two-story annex of a residential hotel, furnish it completely and install a studio dressing room for Ava's daily make-up. At first, this seemed a comfortable way out of the dilemma but the conspicuousness of the place made it all but impossible for Ava to achieve her cherished privacy. At least in the very beginning of her stay she could not venture out, either by day or night, without being confronted by hordes of fans and, of course, eager photographers representing the press from all Australia.

Despite the warm welcome, the dreaded sniping of the press wasn't long in showing itself when one Melbourne paper proclaimed—on the front page, of course—that for her first day of work Ava had arrived an hour late. An unpunctual actress is unpardonable in the movie business, so Ava insisted upon and received a retraction. The smallest details of *On the Beach* were being covered by reporters, assigned to it every day the troupe was there. They had gotten this information from the mimeographed call sheet which, indeed, had listed Ava's call at nine.

But at the last minute her reporting time had been changed to ten.

Encouraged by the appearance of such a derogatory story in a responsible paper, the Australian scandal press sharpened its claws and seized on the fact that Ava had been unwilling to sit still for a press conference, having agreed, as an alternative, to do a series of private interviews. Their tabloids headlined: **DON'T BE SNOOTY AVA!**

This was the cue for the famous rough-and-tumble battle between Ava and the Australian press that followed, climaxed by her visit to Sydney where, cornered in a bistro by a group of cameramen, she tossed a champagne glass at them, thereby making a picture and story their papers relished.

The fish-bowl life she was forced to lead in Melbourne, the carping of the press, and the absence of her usual *divertissements*, jazz joints and flamenco cabarets soon began to tell, so that when Walter Chiari arrived from Italy for a visit, Ava had become a bundle of raw nerves. Although she had invited Walter the moment she arrived and seemed eager and anxious to see him, her mood changed abruptly within a day or so of his arrival. Shortly afterward, Walter left for Sydney where he negotiated a contract with a pair of promoters to perform a variety show at the Stadium in Melbourne. In view of the large number of Italian immigrants in the city, a star of Walter's stature stood an excellent chance of doing S.R.O. business and walking away with a sizable fee. It looked like money in the bank.

When Ava heard about the contract she hit the roof, maintaining Walter was trading on her. For someone interested in bundles of "loot" it was anything but a fair attitude. Consequently when he returned to Melbourne, Walter suffered a torrent of recriminations. The series of quarrelsome discussions that followed brought him to the decision that the best course lay in canceling the appearance and returning to Rome.

Chiari's calculation, however, was made without considering the nature of his promoters. Although they understandingly

agreed to the cancellation and even arranged a press conference for Walter to smooth it over with the newspapers by saying he had been called back to Italy, they showed their true colors after the meeting was over by insisting on damages and reimbursements for expenses they claimed having incurred. The amount was outrageous. Walter fought the exorbitant demand, some five or six thousand Australian pounds, suggesting a more reasonable counteroffer. The promoters refused this flatly and late that night obtained a court order barring him from leaving Australia.

Next day Walter, unmindful of this legal maneuver, was away on location attempting another reconciliation with Ava. He had announced earlier that he was leaving for Italy that evening. The promoters therefore lost no time in installing a watch at the airport—deputies armed with warrants for his arrest. I certainly didn't think that this sort of thing should happen to him merely because of his foolishness in being victimized by sharp promoters. Without consulting anyone, I succeeded in rounding up two thousand pounds in cash to post as bond. Thus Walter was free to leave or remain in Melbourne and fight the case as he chose.

When they returned later in the afternoon, both Ava and Walter sat down and listened to me seriously. Without doubt, Walter was in a bad position. The contract, in the absence of many precedents for theatrical law in Australia, was valid and enforceable. Actually it was a scrap of paper and as written would never have held in the United States. Not being there but in Australia we had to face the truth—some compromise with the promoters would have to be reached.

Ava took me aside. "You know this kind of business," she said. "You help Walter out. I feel sorry for him. Come to me if you need anything."

Aware how mercurial Ava's moods could be, I warned her that pulling Walter out of the mess would take quite a bit of my time and she might resent it later.

"Do everything you can," was her reply.

The first step was to enlist the help of a good lawyer, so I turned automatically to the excellent and respected Melbourne firm representing the Kramer Company. The solution, they decided, lay in Walter's playing the concert and in obtaining a more equitable contract, containing proper concessions to him in respect to supervisory powers over expenditures, managerial representation in the box office the night of the show, and detailed accountings of all revenue and disbursements. These and a revised performance date were readily agreed upon by the promoters, who, with a bond in hand, had nothing to lose.

Walter went to the job of rehearsing the performance and Ava seemed pleased that things had worked a little better for him. However, a day or two before the concert, she called me to say we were flying to Sydney that very afternoon. I complained that I was up to my ears in details, that to leave then would defeat the purpose of her asking me to help Walter. Ava heard me out, then looked at me sternly. "Who are you working for--me or Walter Chiari?"

There was no answer except to count from one to ten.

Of course, I had to go with her to Sydney, leaving Walter and his show to flounder as best they could. This was the Sydney visit in which Ava tossed the glass at the photographer. The incident, naturally, ended our trip and we returned to Melbourne the day of Walter's performance.

To prevent a fast shuffle I had arranged for the lawyer, our own theatre treasurer and myself to be in the box office, my purpose being to count the receipts as soon as the curtain went up and to extract Walter's 50 per cent share on the spot—in cash, a far from unusual procedure. Many artists playing such one-night concert dates demand their fees before stepping onto the platform.

From the beginning of the mess, Ava had said that she would not attend the concert. Yet although knowing my plans about policing the box office and having endorsed them, she tele-

phoned just as I was about to leave for the Stadium. "I'm going to the show. What time should we be there?"

I protested that I couldn't possibly take her, that it would foul things up terribly. Despite our lawyer's capabilities he had not an iota of experience in show business and I knew he would never hold fast to my insistence that the pay-off be made that night—no matter how long we needed to stay up to accomplish it.

I pointed these things out to Ava, who answered coldly, "You'll go with me. Forget the box office."

We arrived at the Stadium and I counted the house delightedly. Considering the doubts that the concert would ever come off, it was a remarkable turnout. Ava and I made our way through a huge and curious crowd to our seats, in the front of the mezzanine.

The show had already started. Ava stayed still for just one sketch, about five minutes, and off we went. Her abrupt departure naturally caused quite a stir and, as was to be expected, lifted verbal eyebrows in the next day's newspaper report of the event.

Late that night the lawyer called me. His voice was triumphant. "They paid off all right. It took a lot of doing, but everything is all right now."

Intuitively, I knew everything wasn't all right. "Were you paid in cash?" I asked quickly.

"No, but I have a check."

It was much too late to point out that a check was the last thing the inexperienced lawyer should have accepted. I simply said okay and good night.

I turned to Ava. "Walter has been paid off all right—with a rubber check."

She looked blankly ahead of her. "He deserves it. He's a sucker."

Next day my prediction proved correct, and we began the disagreeable business of collecting the worthless check. It required

days of threats and finally Walter left for Italy, making an announcement to the press before he departed that his romance with Ava was over.

"I know what I'm doing," Walter said. "No one has to feel sorry because they think I've been hurt. I know when I'm hurt and I know how much hurt I'm willing to take."

"I suffer because I love Ava, and I love her because I understand her, because I know she is so good and defenseless, and because I know she suffers. If I could say just one thing to people, and especially to the press, I would say: 'Be kind to Ava. Because this is the only way to make her realize that people see in her more than she thinks they do.'"

Despite the turbulence of the life in her converted hotel, her troubles with Walter, the viciousness of the publicity, Ava went at *On the Beach* with all her unerring instinct for creating a character. She completely changed the wardrobe around, using many of her own clothes to fit scenes as she felt the mood of the set required. She knocked off one difficult reaction in a single take and beamed when Kramer and the crew cheered and embraced her.

Once she stood still for nineteen takes of a crying scene and told me delightedly afterward, "You know, they had no more glycerine in the crying machine. I wore it all out. We'll probably get the shot tomorrow."

It was a shame, I thought, that so little was known of Ava's professionalism, although this was largely her own fault. Her personal life always seemed so important to her, her work irrelevant. No wonder the press made so much of "Ava's life and loves."

Through the years Ava had steadfastly stood on the absurdity that she was not an actress, that her success as a long-reigning celluloid queen was completely accidental. Wiser movie heads than hers, such as Joseph L. Mankiewicz, George Cukor, Stanley Kramer of course, and others refused to agree and sought unavailingly to convince her otherwise.

In 1954 she came within a vote of winning the New York Critics Award for her performance in *Mogambo*. Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times* fought a last-ditch battle in her behalf. The same performance nominated her for the Academy Award. Once the highly respected French art film magazine *Cahier du Cinema* devoted an entire issue to Ava, idealizing her extravagantly as the perfect Hemingway heroine. The article further enthused that writers like Joseph L. Mankiewicz and Albert Lewin were profoundly in her debt for, without Ava, they could never have found the inspiration to write their scripts of *The Barefoot Contessa* and *Pandora*. Poet Robert Graves in a remarkable story for the *New Yorker* found her completely enchanting.

Earlier in her career Ava won a *Look* Award as one of Hollywood's most popular actresses, and in 1958 the influential motion picture trade paper, *Showman's Trade Review*, included her in its lists of all-time great stars beside Garbo, Crawford, Bette Davis, Mary Pickford, Clark Gable, and Marlene Dietrich. An actress does not achieve recognition of this sort for her skill at frying corn-meal mush.

Once, when the picture was being shot at a bay near Melbourne, thousands of fans swarmed over the location, making it almost impossible to work. Every one of them was there for only one reason—to get a look at Ava, however distant, or snap a picture, however fuzzy.

Surveying the crowd, Ava remarked, "Well, that's why they pay me \$400,000 a picture."

More than anything else, Ava's lack of inner resources accounted for her unpredictable behavior. Although she could read and digest a script that concerned her in a matter of hours and, as Stanley Kramer once said, "give a completely lucid explanation of its merits and faults," she had read little since beginning her odyssey around the world. Nevertheless, a large library of books accompanied her to Melbourne.

She was capable of an appreciation of fine music but rarely gave it the time to enjoy it fully. Not until the end of her stay in Australia did she unpack her tennis rackets, then characteristically indulging in a flurry of energetic playing that petered out after two or three days.

Ava's yearning was always for companionship but companionship on her own inflexible terms. And she needed to possess her companions. "I want everybody I love [she never said "like"] to be mine and mine alone," she told me over and over again. "I know that's wrong. I expect too much of people, so I am always disappointed."

Ava's life in a new place was simply an extension of the one she had just turned her back on, working only when necessary, sleeping all day, playing all night. In this world she was the central figure, calling all the plays and expecting her chums to respond like automatons to every whim and caprice—and these could be pretty devastating at times, when for instance Ava decided a bistro ought to stay open so that she could have one of her balls. Or when she decided to bring the orchestra home early in the morning. Not to answer Ava's telephone calls at dawn would mean that she had been "rejected."

As Ava nervously paced out the last weeks of her stay Melbourne had become disillusioned by the Gardner image. Her ménage was beginning to break up. Beatrice and the maid were returning to California. Walter was back in Rome, and I was sitting out the last days of my contract with Stanley Kramer. My arrangement with Ava had been ended. By refusing to speak to Stanley Kramer on the telephone, Ava almost succeeded in alienating him as well. But his unfailing patience never faltered. "Ava is difficult to know," he said, "but easy to work with."

With Ava in such a mood I was not entirely surprised to hear that Frank Sinatra had suddenly booked himself to play concerts in Melbourne and Sydney. Obviously he had responded to some urgency Ava seemed to feel for seeing him. She had been telephoning him regularly for weeks. Just as she had begun

to realize he was the nearest thing to a good friend in her life, Sinatra's attitude toward her had grown into a warm sense of responsibility for Ava's well-being, although when she arrived in New York accompanied by Walter Chiari en route to the Coast and Australia, Frank refused to answer her calls.

"That makes sense," Ava remarked philosophically. Yet a couple of weeks later in California he could not have been more attentive. Their visits together, however, were brief and apparently unsentimental.

When Ava mentioned that the curiosity of the press about their possible meeting would make one unlikely, I suggested she do something out of the ordinary for her—go to the Melbourne airport and meet him just like plain folks. Without even considering it, she dismissed the idea with, "It won't work."

Inevitably, when it did occur, their meeting was a shambles. Ava had slipped undetected into the Stadium at Sinatra's second concert. The newsmen however were playing possum, waiting for the end of the program when they knew they might get a crack at a chase story instead of a straightforward one of an ex-wife listening to her former husband sing a show.

They did.

Plans called for Ava to be whisked off to Frank's hotel with the utmost secrecy. But the fleet of reporters' cars was ready. One of their vehicles was forced over to the side of the road by a car in the Sinatra party, making another front-page story. Ava was photographed puffing nervously away on a cigarette in her car as it sped to the hotel. There reporters lurked everywhere. Consequently the carefully planned meeting lasted about half an hour. Frank left next day for Sydney and Ava sorrowfully read the newspapers.

The last job I did for Ava was to deny a story no more eventful or outrageous than any of the others I had handled. It had been instigated by a publicity-seeking resort hotel on Australia's Gold Coast which blandly sent out the statement that Ava had leased the entire building for a month, some sixteen rooms, and had

invited her Australian friends and chums from *On the Beach* to be her guests for two weeks.

I explained patiently to the reporter that no such grandiose gesture was planned, that at the very moment Ava was preparing to fly home to Madrid. Her departure was only hours away.

Wearily, I hung up the telephone, glancing across the garden to Ava's building. Ava was at home with Beatrice and the maid—packing as always. Except for the hotel servants and members of the Kramer Company who had come on business, not a soul, I knew, had entered the place for a week.

I looked at the telephone and muttered, "The damned fools! Who's got sixteen friends?"

That evening I read the account of Ava's departure from the airport, the same place she had arrived so excited and so happy only four months before. But now instead of charming photographs of her waving and smiling, there was a shot of Ava behind dark glasses, looking taut and tense.

The reporters had been told, "Miss Gardner does not feel like talking today."

Then the stories told who had been there to see her off—none but people in the Kramer Company who were present simply because of the enormity of shipping all of Ava's things. One of them, booked on the same flight as Ava to San Francisco, flatly refused to travel on the plane, preferring to wait for another hard-to-get reservation.

It was an old, old story. I had read it once but then I hadn't believed it:

"It was a motley turnout to bid farewell to the glamour queen of the movies. When Ava—proud and beautiful—stood on the ramp waving good-by, one of the group said, 'There goes Ava, leaving nothing behind and nothing to look forward to.' "

At Melbourne, Ava didn't even wave good-by.